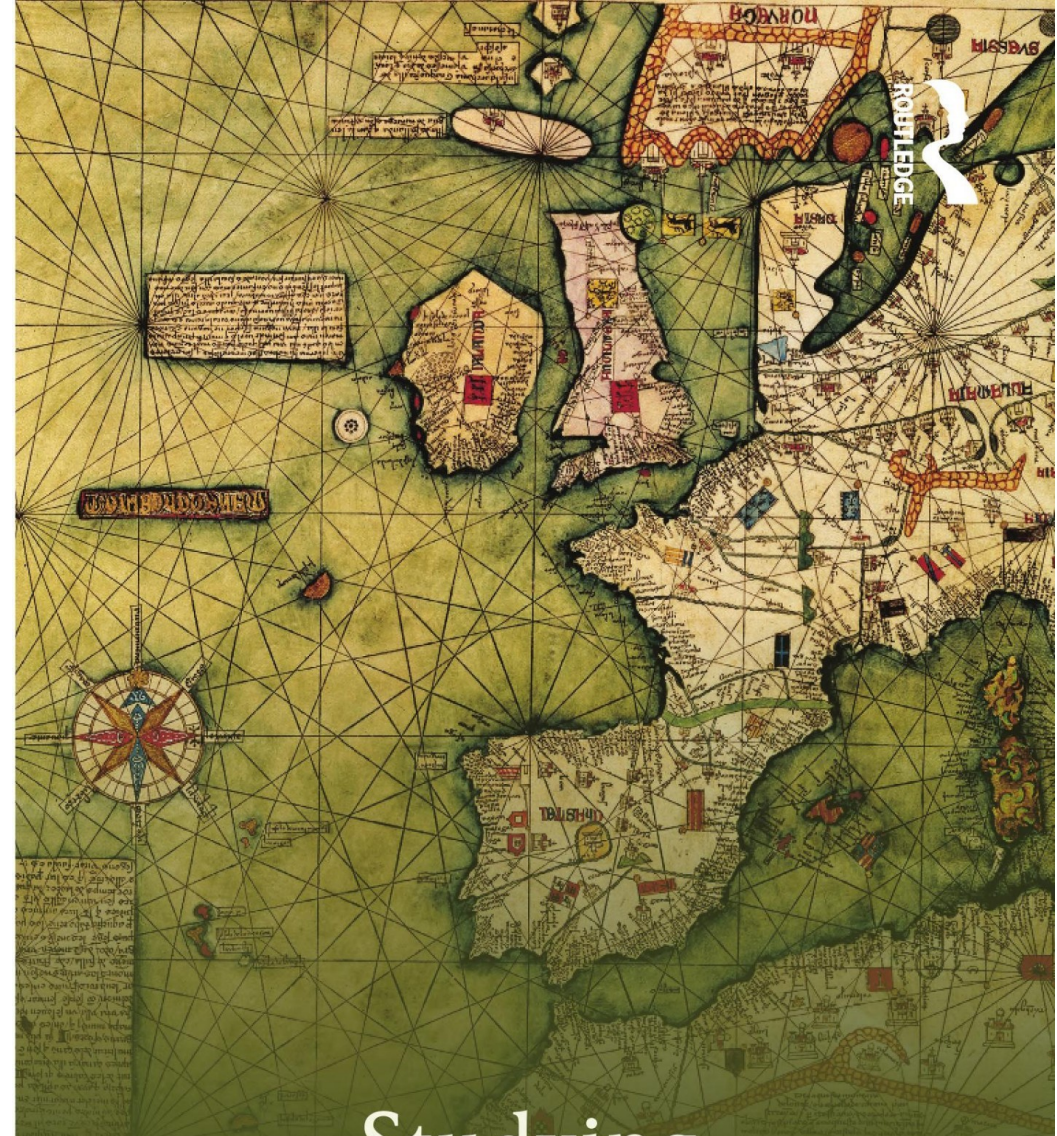




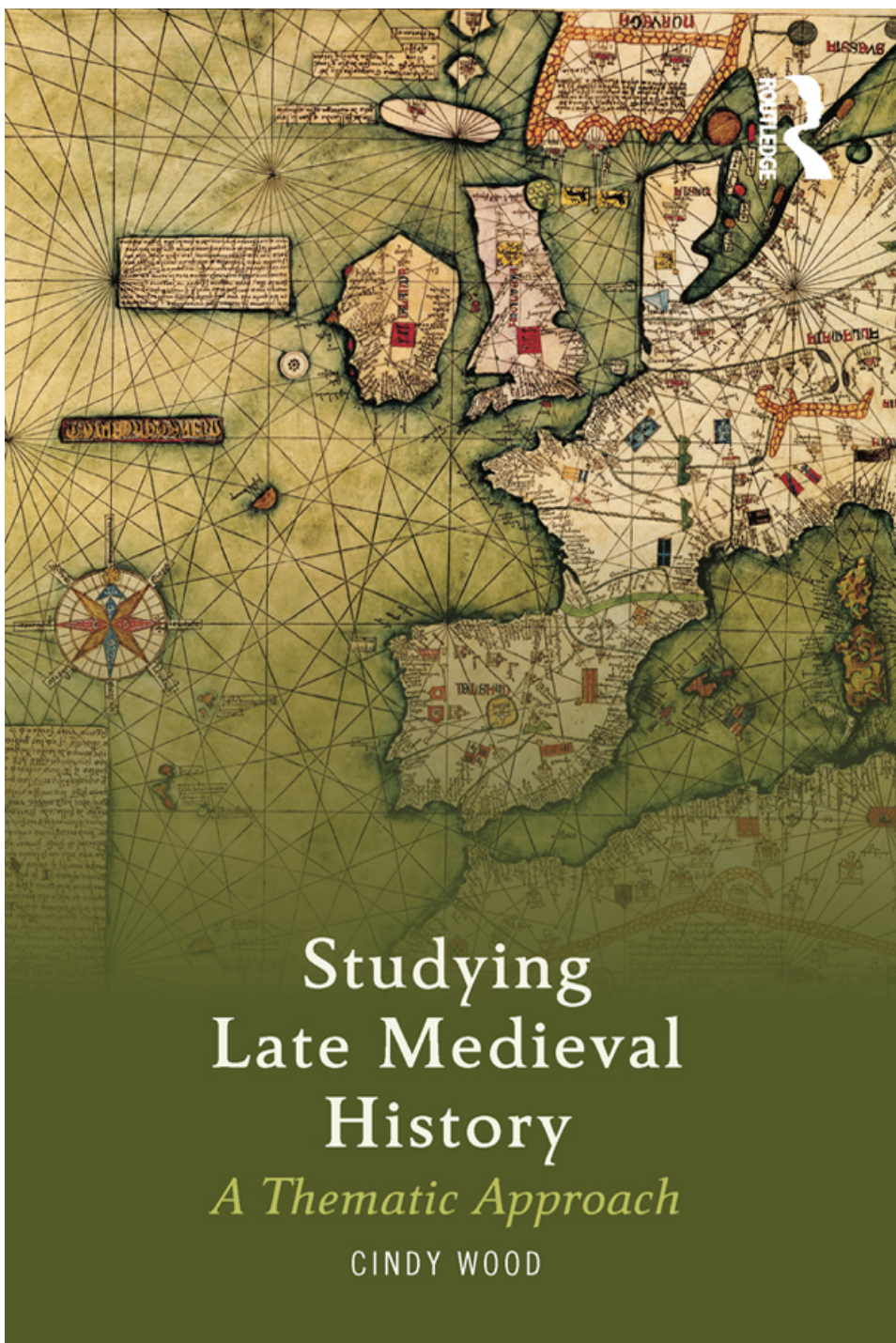
Studying Late Medieval History

A Thematic Approach

CINDY WOOD

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Studying Late Medieval History

A Thematic Approach

CINDY WOOD

Studying Late Medieval History

Studying Late Medieval History is an accessible introduction for undergraduate history students wishing to understand the major topics in late medieval history. Examining the period from 1300–1550, this introductory guide offers an overview of 250 years of transformation, which saw technology, borders, and ruling dynasties across the continent change.

The book focuses on ten key themes to explain what happened, who the important players were, and the significance of these events in shaping medieval Europe. Each chapter is a thematic essay, which looks at the central topics covered at undergraduate level including the church, the monarchy, nobility, parliament, justice, women, warfare, and chivalry. The chapters are supported by a detailed evaluation of the key events students need to know and a guide to further reading for each topic.

Studying Late Medieval History will be essential reading for all those beginning their studies of the late medieval period.

Cindy Wood is Lecturer in History at the University of Winchester.

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A thematic approach

Cindy Wood

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The genesis of this book emerged during my own undergraduate studies, when myself and my good friend and fellow student, Dr Liz Eastlake, often referred to the need for a book that set out the basics to help understand the late medieval/early modern period. To Liz I say, ‘I did it!’ – thank you for your friendship, support and encouragement over the years.

This book also owes much to the inspiration, guidance and support of Professors Michael Hicks and Tom Beaumont James of the University of Winchester. They both inspired me in my academic journey from undergraduate to PhD and to them I owe a massive thank you for opening my eyes to such a rich period of history.

This book has been a challenge to fit 250 years and a whole continent into such a small space, so there will be many omissions and different interpretations. These cannot be blamed on the many sources used and I take responsibility for them and any errors. I have really been a midget on the shoulders of giants in this enterprise.

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But the greatest acknowledgement that needs to be made is to my husband, Dave, and to him I dedicate this book. His unfailing support, both practical and emotional, along with his willingness to learn more about

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Lytchett Matravers, 2016

1

Introduction

Studying the late medieval period can be a challenge at undergraduate level especially if this period has not been covered in either school or college. This book is intended to help bridge this gap, offering a thematic approach to the period rather than a chronological one. Not only do students of this period have to deal with the changes over a period of 250 years, but also the many changes in technology, borders and especially ruling houses. To add to this vast amount of information is the confusion that can come from the use of familiar terms, such as government, parliament, kings, princes, etc., that are used and need to be understood in a vastly different way. I hope this book will address many of these areas.

While this book has the backing of many years of academic study, and especially academic sources, it is written in a deliberately conversational style. If we were to meet and have a conversation about, for example, the medieval church, I would tell you exactly the same things and in this order. The advantage of this book is that you can put it down and have a break.

The period of 1300–1550 has been deliberately chosen as significant. Each section does start a little earlier for context, but 1300 is a pivotal date in many areas. For example, this date marks the end of the rise in the power of the popes across Europe – after this they were significant but their power was curtailed. It marks the start of the consolidation of power by the French kings beyond the Ile de France area, and this change in influence affected the balance of power in Europe in this whole period. In 1300 the population of Europe was at its highest, with its growth being halted by the Great European Famine 1315–17 and then suffering the arrival and devastation of the Black Death 1346–50. This was not to reach the levels of 1300 before the early sixteenth century. This date also marks the decline in the feudal

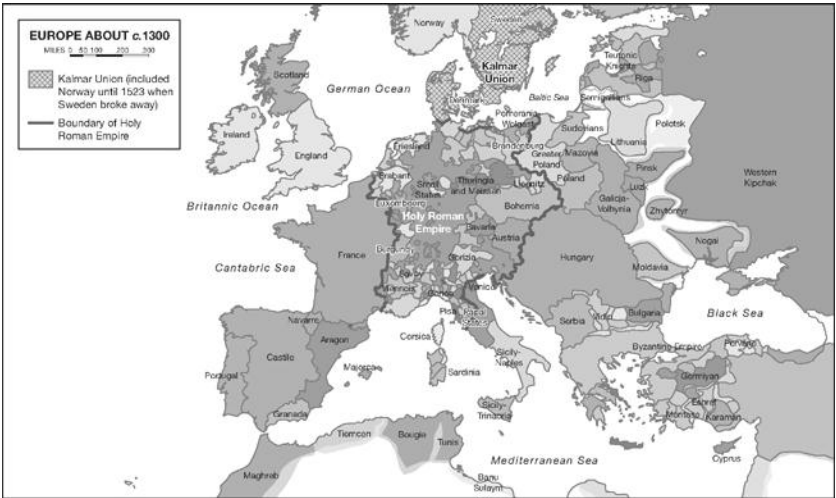
system in operation across the majority of Europe. From 1300 the role and breadth of influence of parliaments across Europe began to rise, to varying degrees of success. In warfare, chivalry was still important but in a different form from that of the popular imagination and its origins in the eleventh century. The great changes in Europe during this period were geographical and territorial as well as political, religious and cultural. A comparison of maps of Europe at the beginning and end of our period is telling (see [Maps 1.1](#) and [1.2](#)).

1550 has been chosen as an end date mainly on the basis that it marks a radical change in European history, with the various Reformations or defence of the Old Religions that occurred at different times and different speeds across the previously united Roman Catholic world. These Reformations had a profound effect on governments, kings and churches across Europe. While the Early Modern period can truly be said to be underway by 1550, this date is also flexible, as the Scottish Reformation can be dated specifically to 1560.

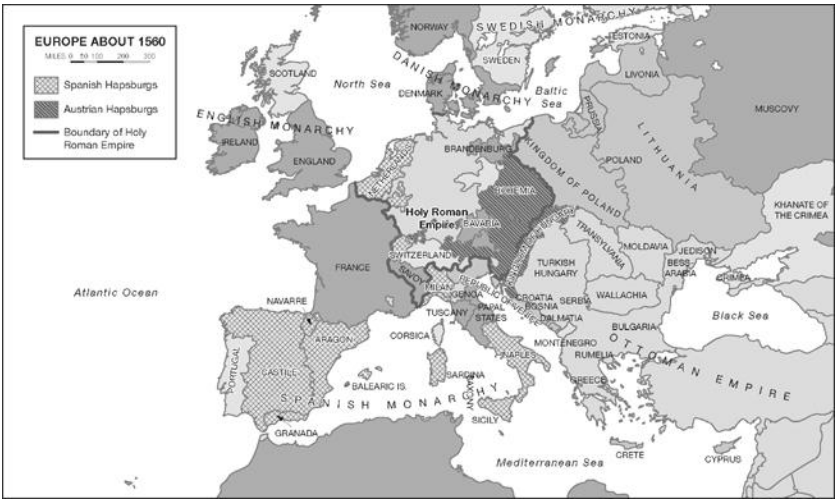
The geographical spread of this book is contained within the bounds of the influence and authority of the Roman Catholic Church. This institution provided a unity in 1300 across Western Europe that will be used as a boundary. In the same way this area covers much of the ancient Roman Empire in the western half of Europe and the Roman Catholic Church based itself on this Empire, with its reuse of buildings and terminologies. For example the pope is also known as the pontiff, based on the ancient Roman office of Pontifex, Roman basilicas were reused as early churches and the use of the ancient Roman Law was widespread. Many of the countries in the east of our area, such as Germany, were under the authority of the Roman church, but had never been part of this earlier, ancient Empire. In this case it is ironic that the temporal successor of the Roman Empire, namely the Holy Roman Empire, should be based in many of these eastern areas especially Germany.

Although there will be a concentration on the countries of England, France, Spain, Italy and Germany, other countries will also be considered. The influence and teachings of the Roman Catholic Church came later to the Scandinavian countries, and these will be discussed when relevant, in the same way as those to the east, such as Poland and Hungary. In the period covered by this book these eastern limits of the Church were still fighting the Muslims, who at various times threatened to overrun the Western part of Europe. The Roman Catholic Church also provided a unity for this period, in language –it used Latin across all boundaries; liturgy – the form of church services, and its belief structures. It was the only truly

international organisation of the period.



Map 1.1
Europe, 1300



Map 1.2
Europe, c. 1550

Europe at 1300 was still threatened on its eastern borders by the Turks, but by 1550 these borders had been firmly established, with the kingdom of Hungary at the forefront of this fight. To the southeast the remnants of the ancient Roman Empire were still to be found in the Byzantine Empire based in Constantinople (now Istanbul), and included most of Greece. The Crusader States in the Holy Land had been lost by this date and any crusades in our period were against the Turkish threat or heretics. To the south, the Mediterranean made a natural border, and the islands in this sea were under Christian control. To the west, the Reconquista of the Iberian Peninsula was ongoing. The earlier invasion of Moors into this area after the fall of the ancient Roman Empire was being reversed in our period. While in 1300 the Moors (Muslims) were only in the south in Granada and Andalusia, by 1492 they were all expelled, leading to the consolidation of the three kingdoms of Portugal, Castile and Aragon. Navarre (the current Basque region) was a separate kingdom linked to the French throne. To the north, the kingdom of England had just taken over the principality of Wales in 1300, and the subsequent attempt to do the same to the independent kingdom of Scotland was not successful. The kings of England also claimed lordship over Ireland. Further north the kingdoms of Denmark, Sweden and Norway were in the Kalmar Union until the early sixteenth century, but still remained independent kingdoms. While their borders remain much as they are today they did extend their power and influence further to the north in our period. In the centre of Europe the largest block was the Holy Roman or German Empire, which covered most of modern Germany, northern parts of Austria and France.

This book will look at the late medieval period in themes, such as the Church, women, warfare and monarchy for example. It is important to realise that while these are written in distinct groups, in reality there were always overlaps and all were intertwined. The focus is on offering an insight into life in this period through these themes, and helping to understand that many terms that were common then had a different connotation in this period. Parliaments grew in importance and influence in many countries in this period, but the meaning of the term has changed; they did not use it as we would today. Universal suffrage was centuries away in both 1300 and 1550, but all countries had a degree of consultation; the differences and similarities between countries will be discussed. Likewise, kings and princes survive to the present and while the term remains the same their roles and level of power do not.

Compressing 250 years of history is a mammoth task, and it is hoped that consideration of many of these themes will encourage the reader's

understanding and keenness to read more deeply and widely on this topic. The late medieval period is a fascinating time of changes, developments, murder, mayhem and crisis. All of these were enacted or lived through by real people, and their experiences form the basis of our study. This period can offer many insights to our world today and as such is deserving of a wider and better understanding by students and the general public than currently exists. I hope this book moves this understanding forward a small amount, and that you enjoy a brief glimpse into this fascinating period of history.

Further reading

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2

The Church

Introduction

It is impossible to comprehend the late medieval period without an understanding of the importance of the Church, and until the early sixteenth century this meant the Roman Catholic Church, headed by the Pope in Rome, which had a virtual monopoly over religion in Western Europe. The only exceptions were the Muslims on the fringes of Christendom, for example, in the Iberian Peninsula and south-east Europe, and the small but significant groups of Jews who were at various times in many European countries.

This chapter will look at the Church in its many guises, its beliefs, organisation, the types of religious men and women, the monastic experience, the parish, types of churches and finally the Reformations that occurred across Europe in the sixteenth century.

The influence of religion and the Church was experienced in many different areas of life and was believed by the population in a much more intimate way than is perhaps normal for many today. Religion shaped the year, with the major festivals of Christmas and Easter taking place at the changes of the seasons. Christmas had appropriated the pagan festival of Saturnalia and takes place just after the shortest day of the year, as days start to lengthen. Likewise, Easter, although a moveable feast, takes place in spring.

Many of the major feasts in the liturgical year were not just celebrated but EXPERIENCED, by both the laity and clergy. For example, in Holy

Week the Stations of the Cross were used (and still are) to recreate Jesus' journey to crucifixion. These experiences start on Palm Sunday (Sunday before Easter Day), with a procession, and involved 'creeping to the Cross' on Good Friday; this was a physical journey, not just a mental one. At this time of year most churches also built an Easter Sepulchre, a representation of the tomb of Jesus, and placed a crucifix within it until Easter Sunday. Likewise processions and physical movement around the church, churchyard or community accompanied the many celebrations of the year, especially major saints' days. Medieval religion was a living and vital force for the majority, and the celebrations linked religion to the everyday experiences of believers, such as Candlemas (40 days after Christmas), when processions and candles were dedicated to the Virgin Mary to mark her Purification. This is celebrated around 2 February, and it celebrates Mary's return to the Temple 40 days after giving birth.

Other important days across the year were saints' days. The major saints, include John the Baptist, whose birth (24 June) and beheading (29 August) were both celebrated. Likewise the Virgin Mary (also known as the Beata Virgo Maria/Beate Virginis Marie or BVM) had several feast days, for example her birth (8 September), the Annunciation when the angel Gabriel told her she was pregnant with the Holy Spirit (25 March, nine months before Christmas, also called Lady Day), and her Purification. There were in fact hundreds of different saints' days; and while the major saints, such as the Apostles and some early Church Fathers, were Europe-wide, others were more local, by either region or country. The term 'red letter days' comes from the calendars of saints' days, where the days celebrating major saints were written in red ink, not black. Celebrations could include special masses as well as feasts and fairs. Those people belonging to a guild dedicated to a particular saint also celebrated with feasts on these days, and were often major events in the annual calendar.

Other events in the year not linked specifically to saints were Ascension Day and Holy Week, all connected to Easter, a moveable feast. Local saints were also celebrated, but not widely; examples include St Heribert of Cologne (16 March) in Germany, St Aldric of Le Mans (7 January) in France, St Illuminata of Todi, Umbria (29 November) in Italy, and St Edburg of Winchester (15 June), in England. There was a definite hierarchy of saints, and their relative importance is denoted by their regional influence.

Medieval life was also broken into definite phases by the Church in the same way that religious festivals and events broke up the year. All the important events of life were recognised by the Church, and rites developed

around them. Baptism was the most important for any medieval Christian as it welcomed the individual into the family of the Church. Such was the importance of this rite that non-priests, such as midwives, were allowed to baptise children if they were in danger of death, to avoid a child dying outside the Church family. Likewise, marriages were mostly conducted under the authority of the Church, and in parish churches this often took place in the church porch, not in the body of the church itself. Death was also recognised by the Church as an important transition, and by the fifteenth century there was considerable advice on how to die well. The deathbed was recognised as a place where the Devil would be at hand to tempt the dying into sinful thoughts. Therefore the dying hoped to be comforted by their friends and clergy, on their deathbed, with prayers helping the soul in this period of temptation. Most in this period aspired to die in this way. There were a considerable number of rites that had also developed surrounding burial and remembrance of the dead, including a special mass for the dead being developed, the Requiem Mass. There was no cremation of bodies in this period and all people were buried in consecrated ground. To be buried outside of this space denoted being beyond the family of the Church and was reserved for criminals.

Death was also an important event for the church. Most people would hope for a 'good death', one with time for reflection, making a will (a deathbed task), and the opportunity for the correct rites of the church to be administered, such as Last Rites.

The Church took its responsibility in the lives of its communicants very seriously. It was able to decide who could marry in terms of any family relationships, including that of godparents. This is known as consanguinity, a determining of the blood relationship between people. This was measured in 'degrees of affinity', and it became significant in a period when inter-relationships were common, especially among the nobility. There were many instances of petitions to the Pope for absolution of a marriage based on newly discovered degrees of affinity. This was a very complex area for our period, and it was judged in the specific courts run by and for the Church. These courts also judged on matters of sexual conduct, both within and outside marriage, such as adultery, illegitimate children, homosexuality etc., but not rape, which was seen as a criminal act that was dealt with in secular courts. Punishments imposed in Church courts often included public penance such as walking the local area with bare feet or head while holding a candle. This act of public contrition was understood by those in the locality.

In many western European countries there were other important dates

that had both religious and secular importance. These were the quarter or rent days, generally the four times of the year when rent was payable and also when servants were hired. The concept was similar across Europe, but the dates could vary. For example, in England the four rent days were Christmas (25 December); Annunciation or Lady Day (25 March); the Nativity of St John the Baptist (25 July) and Michaelmas (29 September). In Scotland the rent days were Candlemas (2 February); Whit Sunday (normally a moveable feast but fixed on 15 May); Lammas Day (1 August) and Martinmas (1 November). However in Hungary there were only three rent days, Christmas (25 December) and Easter plus one other, often St Emeric Day (5 November). These were a reflection of how the secular and religious calendars were closely intertwined, with important feast days appropriated for other, more temporal, purposes.

Beliefs

Christians believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, that he was born in Bethlehem, and that after a number of years, probably thirty, he started a three-year ministry culminating in his death by crucifixion in Jerusalem. His death is traditionally commemorated on Good Friday (at the end of Holy Week), and it is believed that after three days he rose again from the dead to greet his followers (his male ones were called Apostles), claiming victory over death and the Devil. This is celebrated on Easter Sunday, the most religiously significant day of the year. After a further forty days Jesus rose to Heaven, a feast called Ascension, where he sits at God's right hand. For many centuries his return to Earth was expected imminently, and was called the Day of Final Judgment, as it was seen as the end of the world when all souls would be weighed and judged. Those deemed worthy would pass on God's right hand into heaven and those not would pass on his left side to Hell.

Images of this Day of Final Judgment are found in many churches across Europe as wall paintings, carvings, and in private devotional books, such as Books of Hours. Some images depict Jesus with the scales ready to weigh souls, while others depict this action being undertaken by the archangel Gabriel, with Jesus enthroned above him.

From the early days of Christianity death was an important preoccupation of the living. The Church Fathers, early leaders of the church in the first and second century after Jesus' death, included this feature in their explanations of the many elements of Christian religion, and from this early period it was believed that prayers for the dead would aid their souls

after death. Originally, it was believed that all Christians were judged on their behaviour and strength of belief at the time of death, the trial of Purgation, normally associated with fire. But this idea of purgation of a soul was developed in the succeeding centuries and by the twelfth century this event of purgation had stretched to become a PLACE where purgation was undertaken. This was Purgatory.



Figure 2.1
Day of Final Judgment (Doom Painting), Holy Trinity Church,
Coventry, UK

Source: © Ian M Butterfield (UK)/Alamy Stock Photo

Purgatory, as a place, was officially adopted as doctrine of the Church in 1215 at the Fourth Lateran Council, a meeting of the senior clergy of the church called by the pope, in this case, Innocent III (r. 1198–1216) and held in Rome. As it was believed that Purgatory only ended on the Day of Final Judgment, its length could never be determined and thus different ways of relieving the expected suffering were developed. Chief among these was the increase in Divine Service through the provision of Masses. A Mass was (and still is) the central element in Roman Catholic worship, and is based on the invocation of Jesus in the Last Supper to remember him through bread and wine. It was believed that the provision of a Mass and the prayers of the living could assist the suffering of the souls of the dead.

Purgatory, with its attendant suffering, was not the only place a soul could go after death, there were also two Limbos. One was for the Church

Fathers, such as Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, who could not profess belief in Jesus as they lived before he was born. Due to their status they could not be expected to suffer in Purgatory, so it was believed that their souls entered Limbo where they were known to be in a state of happiness, not suffering, until entering Heaven on the Day of Final Judgment. As they were not saints, they could not enter heaven immediately. The other Limbo was for children who, while being born in original sin, had not had any time to gather any personal sin. These souls also entered Limbo, waiting for the Day of Final Judgment, but not suffering the trials of purgation.

These places and their categorisation were the result of many centuries of theological discussion and development. By 1250 these arguments had reached their apogee, and they did not radically change until the challenges of the sixteenth century. We can see this belief in many physical manifestations, which will be discussed below. This was sophisticated doctrine, and while it is not really known how much every level of society across Europe understood it, we can be sure that these elements were part of general understanding and affected daily life in many ways. The Fourth Lateran Council was also an important milestone for dissemination of the agreed beliefs that underpinned doctrine until the challenges of the sixteenth century. This Council decreed that Purgatory was real and that everyone should attend church in Holy Week and confess their sins to receive penance. The range of sins was wide and this edict led to a number of manuals being produced to help parish priests recognise these sins and the penances they required.

Intercession

It was a belief of this period that at the point of death the soul changed or ‘quicken’d’ and moved into another experience. But souls were still aware of the prayers offered on their behalf by the living hoping to mitigate the pains of Purgatory. It was a horror of the period to be left alone in Purgatory without the prayers of family and friends. Although the efficacy of the Mass was believed to be central to relief of Purgatorial suffering, there were other ways in which the soul be relieved of these sufferings through Acts of Mercy, both Spiritual and Temporal (see below).

The Mass was central to the religious experience of the period. During this service at the Elevation of the Host, the bread and wine *became* the body and blood of Jesus through a process called Transubstantiation. This was the most sacred part of the daily round of services. Often in parish churches this Elevation was not visible, as a rood screen – a physical

partition between the nave and the choir – could make an altar completely invisible. These screens could be stone or wood, and they were often highly decorated. The attendant congregation would only know the Elevation was happening by the ringing of the Sacring Bell. It was not necessary to see this event, merely to be in its presence. Given the importance placed on the Mass to the fate of souls, it became a very common feature for additional masses to be endowed with land or money for Masses to be performed for founders. These endowed Masses are known as chantries (or chaplainries in Scotland and France) and, as they increased ‘divine service’, were seen as pleasing to God and as providing aid for the soul suffering the pains of purgation, but especially for their founders. The founding of chantries was a widespread feature of the late Middle Ages across Europe, and they were the most popular form of religious foundation in this period.

Chantries could be founded at existing altars, or new altars could be set up. It was possible to have several chantries founded at an altar, which then operated on a rota system to ensure these were always performed in response to the founders’ wishes. While it was common in England for these endowed, chantry masses to be performed every day, in Scotland it was more common to only perform these on particular days of the week. This difference can be explained by both tradition and financial resources. All masses were performed between daybreak and 11am; in winter months, with shorter days, therefore, timing was crucial.

Many chantries were located in their own physical space, and these are called chantry chapels. In France these were often built externally between the buttresses of the east end of churches, whereas in English churches, especially cathedrals, internal space was appropriated.

Endowing a mass required some financial resources, often out of the reach of many of the population, but there were other ways in which the souls of the dead could be remembered and prayed for. The provision of lights in front of statues, on altars and at funerals was important and often the most popular method of expressing piety at a low cost. These lights were seen to represent the donor in the church when they would not otherwise be present, and were a popular request in wills of this period, often paid for by gifts of livestock.

For those without great financial means the other option was to join a guild or fraternity, which occurred in two types, craft or religious. The craft guilds joined those in the same occupation and had a dual function of both providing a priest to pray for the souls of all members, living and dead, and acting in an authoritative manner in regard to financial matters, apprenticeships and standards. Religious guilds were founded to provide a

priest who could provide prayers and Masses for members both living and dead. These were often dedicated to a saint or other religious themes, the Holy Trinity for example. All guilds had a social function as well, including a feast on the saint's day and providing mourners at a funeral. Many guilds could be joined for very small sums of money, and provided even lower echelons of society with the intercessionary benefit of a dedicated mass.

Many other actions were seen as beneficial to the soul after death, in line with the Seven Acts of Spiritual and the Seven Acts of Temporal Mercy.

<i>Acts of Spiritual Mercy</i>	<i>Acts of Temporal Mercy</i>
Admonish the sinner	Feed the hungry
Instruct the ignorant	Provide drink for the thirsty
Counsel the doubtful	Clothe the naked
Comfort the sorrowful	Visit the prisoner
Bear wrongs patiently	Shelter the homeless
Forgive injuries	Visit the sick
Pray for the living and dead	Bury the dead

These Acts of Mercy can be seen in the different religious foundations, such as chantries and also those wishes expressed in wills of the period. It was common to provide clothes, food and drink to the poor who attended a funeral and also the anniversary masses known as 'obits,' and the prayers of the poor were considered especially beneficial to the soul. Wills also offer evidence for money being given to feed prisoners. This source of evidence also demonstrates the many temporary chantries founded for either specific periods or for a sum of money in exchange for soul masses. The more permanent and expensive foundations of hospitals and schools also need to be seen in this category, as the founder would expect to be included in the daily prayers of those they had helped by providing shelter and food. Chantries were often associated with schools, where the chantry priests were expected to provide a rudimentary local education. These might often be located in rooms above church porches.

The foundation of a hospital or larger schools such as Winchester College, Hampshire (England) required considerable funds and endowments. Hospitals were not necessarily for medical treatment but were often almshouses for elderly men and women. These were founded across Europe and provided a valuable social function, but many provided these services for elderly servants of prominent local residents including bishops.

The larger establishments required large endowments and were therefore limited to those who could afford such investments, and this included some wealthy guilds who were able to support almshouses.

Many of the functions seen as the responsibility of the modern state were covered by intercessionary acts of this period. The rich were expected to assist the poor, and the poor in return offered their prayers for the souls of their benefactors. Almshouses provided shelter and food for elderly destitute people; road repairs and bridge building were also seen as a civic duty that provided relief for the soul in Purgatory. In addition, it was also common for wills to mention sums to be given to poor maidens as dowries to help them marry. This had another function of encouraging marriage, and therefore avoiding the sin of fornication, and children being born out of wedlock. In all these examples it was understood that the recipients would then pray for their benefactor.

The impact of intercessionary actions on late medieval life should not be underestimated. These were woven closely into normal life and along with the other influences of the Church on life-events and the calendar provided an environment where these two were inextricably linked at all phases of life and in death.

Church organisation

Parishes

By 1250 most of Europe was already divided into parishes, the smallest administrative division of the Church. These had two functions: first, in administrative terms they served the organisation of the Church at its base level. Second, they provided people with a local focus for their devotions, services and religious education, and it was also where they paid their tithes or church taxes. In return they were provided with a priest who catered for their souls, known as ‘cure of souls’.

It was in the parish church that people were christened, married and buried. The parishioners were generally responsible for the upkeep of the public part of the church, the west end or nave. The chancel, or east end, of a church was the responsibility of the rector.

Each parishioner was required to pay tithes or church taxes to their parish church in the form of either goods or money. In Scotland these were called *teinds*. Generally tithes were a tenth of all produce within an agrarian system. The rector was the priest in charge of the parish and responsible for the ‘cure of the souls’ of the area and he was also the recipient of the tithes,

out of which he paid any charges required by the diocese.

Parishes were often formed in the first millennia of Church history with a close relationship with the lord of the manor. In many cases the church was placed next to the lord's house, he paid for the building and as patron had the right to appoint the rector. This lay (or secular) control over the church became an unpopular situation in the later medieval period and many parishes passed into the control of other church institutions, especially monastic houses. In these circumstances the monasteries were the 'rectors', able to collect the tithes and appoint clergy. Unless a member of the religious community lived in the parish to provide this 'cure of souls', that is the expected round of services, it was common practice to appoint another, non-monk, as priest for the parish, known as a vicar (From the Latin vicarious or deputy). These vicars were paid a salary from the tithes, with the rector or monastery collecting the difference. This was a popular movement to augment monastic income in this period.

In these cases the vicar then became responsible for the round of services, and therefore the 'cure of souls' and was often given 'glebe' land for cultivation to augment this salary.

Diocese

Countries were divided into diocese, each headed by a bishop, and across Europe these generally did not straddle country boundaries. Each bishop had a cathedral church, in which his cathedra, or seat, was located, hence the name of the church. A cathedral was and still is the mother church of the diocese. This division of the Church could be of varying size, with no standard numbers of parish churches or number of people living within them.

It was only in England that a cathedral could also be a monastery where a prior headed the monastic community, not an abbot, as the bishop was nominally the abbot of the house. Examples include Canterbury Cathedral, also the monastery of Christchurch, Winchester Cathedral, the Priory of St Swithun and Norwich Cathedral, the Priory of the Holy Trinity. Communities of secular priests manned all other cathedrals across Europe, that is, priests who did not live by a monastic Rule, headed by a Dean and assisted by a Chapter. A Chapter was a group of male priests who were funded by groups of parishes within the diocese, known as a prebend. Within a Chapter different members undertook various roles in the same way as a monastery.

In the later Middle Ages it was common for bishops to act as envoys for

both popes and kings, and indeed they were often absent for great periods from their diocesan duties. In these cases suffragan bishops often undertook many of their duties, for example, ordaining new priests or visiting churches and monasteries to enquire about standards and quality. Suffragan bishops had no geographical diocese to attend to, and were often named for places either in Muslim held areas or ones unknown to them and occasionally the modern historian. Examples included Pharensis now thought to be Paros, Calliopolitensis understood to be Gallipoli or Christopolis whose location is completely unknown.

Bishoprics or diocese had a hierarchy of seniority in each country, and bishops could be promoted to more senior diocese if a vacancy occurred.

Provinces (Archdiocese)

Provinces were headed by archbishops, and in the context of a Province were also called 'metropolitans'. The senior archbishop in each country was also called the Primate, and these were always linked to the same archbishopric, for example, Canterbury in England, Mainz in Germany and Armagh in Ireland. They performed the same function as every other archbishop, but took precedence over the other archbishops and often had the honour of crowning sovereigns.

The spread of provinces across Europe was not even, as there were only two metropolitan archbishops in England: Canterbury and York compared to France, which had fourteen.

Popes

The Pope was, and still is, the head of the Roman Catholic Church in Rome, the centre of the Roman Empire at the time of Jesus' death. Christianity was never centred in Jerusalem, but the Holy Sites that related to events of Jesus' life and ministry were important destinations for pilgrimages from a very early date. The destruction and dispersal of the Jewish people from Palestine by Romans in 79 AD (creating the *Diaspora*), also affected the initial growth of Christianity. Popes trace their ancestry back to St Peter, one of Jesus' disciples, whose name means 'the Rock' in Aramaic and this is how he is considered within the foundation of Christianity, as the rock on which the Church was founded. Peter travelled to Rome after Jesus' crucifixion, and was crucified there (upside-down) with St Paul in 64/5 AD (or possibly 67/8 AD). This direct succession is not wholly substantiated in the historical record, but is now generally

accepted as 'truth'. Eventually Constantine the Great (272–337) placed Peter's remains in a tomb under what is currently St Peter's Church, Vatican City.

The term Pope comes from the Latin *papa*, the father of the church. The term pontiff is also used in conjunction with the popes in their role as Bishops of Rome, from the old Roman title of *pontifex* or high priest. The pope is the *pontius maximus* – or highest priest in the Catholic Church.

As leader of the Church popes are the ultimate source of authority and doctrine. As seen above, they were assisted by the rest of the Church organisation but this was a 'top-down' structure. Over the centuries the popes assisted and often led the development of the liturgy (the form of services), the doctrine (the set of beliefs or principles) and the laws of the Church, which in turn affected all people in Western Europe. As the focus of the Roman Empire moved with Constantine the Great (272–337) to his capital Constantinople (now Istanbul), the Popes chose to remain in Rome. The first general council meeting of the different strands of Christianity met at the Council of Nicaea, 325 AD, called by Emperor Constantine. This 'ecumenical' gathering was the first of many where important decisions on questions of faith were addressed. Nicaea is seen as the start of the separation of the two strands of the Church, the Eastern or Orthodox and the Western or Papal, although it must be noted that the pope did not attend. At this Council and the later Council of Constantinople, in 381, a doctrine was agreed that is still recited in Anglican and Roman Catholic services today (although attributed to Nicaea). This is known as the Nicene Creed.

But the Constantinople Council was also evidence of the growing rift between the Eastern and Western churches, although at this point the tension was more about the primacy of the bishop of Rome over other bishops. The division between these two branches of Christianity is called a schism, and it was a slow process with periods of attempted reconciliation and breakdowns in the following centuries, until the Great Schism in 1054. There were doctrinal as well as authoritarian distinctions between the two churches that have never been fully resolved, and the two branches still operate as separate organisations.

Over the next centuries through the fall of the Western Roman Empire to the barbarian hordes, the popes maintained their authority over the Church and western countries, some with more success than others. The popes often led the efforts to convert parts of Europe that had been overrun by pagans after the fall of the Roman Empire in the fifth century, bringing the Roman Church, rather than the Celtic Church to prominence by the eighth century. The Celtic church had survived in the northern margins of the

Roman Empire after its collapse. The Synod (another term for a meeting that often decided items of doctrine) meeting of Whitby, England, in 664, ostensibly to decide the date of Easter, was in fact a triumph of the Roman church over the Celtic church in England. This is an important date for this reason, as this alternative to Roman Catholicism was reduced in influence and power from this date.

In our period popes were not only religious leaders, but also temporal ones. They ruled an area in Italy called the Papal States, covering the central section of Italy, with the support of the French king Louis IX (1214–70) and his brother Charles, Duke of Anjou (1227–85), who was also king of Sicily. By 1250 this was a relatively new occurrence as previously this area had been under the control of the German or Holy Roman Emperor. From 1250 the popes were able to consolidate their temporal position, at a time when the individual city-states of Italy, such as Milan, Florence and Venice were also exerting their own authority. The issues of the Holy Roman Empire and the increasingly powerful French kings were to set the scene for the struggles of the next three hundred years. During this time the balance of power changed frequently, and the popes were part of this changing political climate. Ultimately these pressures led to the problems of the fourteenth century, the Avignon Papacy and the Great Schism of the Western Church, unrelated to the Great Schism of the Eastern and Western Churches.

Until the election of Boniface VIII as pope in 1294 (r. 1294–1303), the previous popes, for example, Celestine V (1289–94) had been under the control of the French kings, and had been located in Naples, not Rome. The accession of Boniface ushered in a new era, when the papacy, after moving back to Rome, tried to assert its authority not only in spiritual matters, but also in temporal ones. The flashpoint between Louis and Boniface was over the influence and reach of the popes within other temporal kingdoms. In 1297 Boniface issued the ‘Clericos Laicos’, a papal bull (a decree from the pope sealed with a lead ‘bulla’ – hence its name) designed to prevent kings taxing the clergy in their own countries without papal permission. This bull was challenged by both Philip IV, the Fair, of France (1268–1314) and Edward I of England, (1239–1307), and in response the pope issued the ‘Unam Sanctam’ Bull that defined the pope’s sovereignty. This was accompanied by a threat of excommunication to the French king, and it proved too much for Philip. In 1303, a group of Frenchmen marched on the pope’s summer residence at Anagni, and took him captive. Although he was only captive for a month before being released with the support of local people, the experience proved too much for Boniface, who died a

month later. The excommunication of Philip was never enacted, and the French influence, or threat, can be clearly seen in the election of the next pope in 1305, Clement V, the archbishop of Bordeaux. This pope never set foot in Rome, and remained at Avignon after being crowned in Lyon. At this date Avignon was not part of France but a papal territory, and did not become part of France until 1791, although it was conveniently located for the French kings at this time.

This started the seventy-year period known as the Avignon papacy or 'Babylonian Captivity', in comparison to the Babylonian captivity of the Children of Israel as in the Old Testament. While Avignon was convenient for the French kings and their influence over the popes, it must also be said that at this point Rome was not a hospitable place for the popes either, and was subject to many disturbances between different aristocratic families, hence earlier popes establishing themselves at Naples.

Clement V went on to abolish the parts of the bulls 'Clericos Laicos' and 'Unam Sanctum' that were not to the liking of the French king in 1306. His location in Avignon, not Italy, was also convenient especially during the suppression of the Knights Templar in 1312 on the orders of the French king. This suppression, always contentious, was probably financially motivated, and was the culmination of a campaign against the order by Philip IV, who accused them of gross immorality and heresy.

Avignon was never expected to be the permanent home of the pope, being a practical reaction to events, but the popes did build a large palace in the city, which still survives. The residency and the relationship of the Avignon popes to the French throne seriously damaged their reputation from this period onwards. While it can be demonstrated that the Avignon popes did not always follow pro-French policies after Clement V, what is true is that they promoted a majority of Frenchmen as cardinals, and no Germans; and during the Hundred Years' War (1337–1453) their sympathies were with the French, not the English. A positive view of this period was that the papal administration was greatly improved, bureaucracy was modernised and financial arrangements ensured maximum benefit for the Church.

Avignon popes

Clement V	†1305–14	Archbishop of Bordeaux
John XXII	1316–34	Bishop of Avignon
Benedict XII	1334–12	Bishop of Pamiers (Monk/ Inquisitor)
Clement VI	1342–52	Archbishop of Rouen

		(Monk/Chancellor of France)
Innocent VI	1352–62	Bishop of Clermont
Urban V	1362–70	Abbot of Marseilles
Gregory XI	1371–78	Bishop of Limousin

Gregory XI (1371–78) finally managed to return the popes to Rome, after the unsuccessful attempts by Urban V. This coincided with the Papal States being brought under their control as well. But as soon as Gregory XI managed this he died, and the subsequent election of his successor led to the Great Schism, a period when the papacy was split between two, and occasionally three popes, all of whom had different supporters across Europe.

At the time of Gregory XI's death in 1378, the cardinals were split over whom to appoint as his successor. This election was then overtaken by the Roman mob, who entered the conclave (election gathering of cardinals) to resist the idea of a non-Italian pope, and the conclave ended. After a delay, the conclave was re-gathered and the Archbishop of Naples was elected as Urban VI. Urban quickly proved unsuitable, being violent and neurotic, and he also created another group of twenty-five cardinals, an entire college (collective noun for cardinals in Rome), a scandalous act at the time. In the meantime, the French cardinals returned to Avignon and elected their own pope, Clement VII, with the support of the French king, and thus started the Great Schism, with a series of popes in the rival centres of Rome and Avignon.

Schisms, or splits, in the Church had happened before; indeed the schism with the Orthodox Church in Eastern Christendom was still ongoing. But this schism was different, each candidate for the papacy had different supporters across Europe. The Avignon popes, perhaps naturally, had the support of the French kings, while the Holy Roman Emperor generally supported those in Rome. Likewise, England supported the Roman, or Urbanist, popes, while Scotland followed France's lead and supported the Avignon popes. The French popes were called 'Anti-popes', and also had the support of Castile, Aragon, Navarre, Portugal, Denmark, Norway and some minor German states.

<i>Popes (Roman)</i>	<i>Anti-popes</i>	
	<i>(Avignon)</i>	
Urban VI	1378–89	Clement VII 1378–94

Boniface IX	1389–1404	Benedict XIII	1394–1422
Innocent VII	1404–06		
Gregory XII	1406–15		

The Great Schism meant that Europe was divided and this also affected the authority of the popes, as each side was forced to give concessions to their supporters. Scotland, for example, received permission from the anti-pope, Clement VII (1378–94), for their first cardinal, Bishop Wardlaw of Glasgow, in 1383; previously the Church in Scotland had been under the nominal control of the Archbishops of York. Scotland was also granted its first university, St Andrews, by Benedict XIII in 1413.

Boniface IX and Clement VII both excommunicated each other, and after Clement's death in 1394 a compromise was suggested, and even Boniface's English supporters asked him to resign to allow an undisputed election, but he refused. Thus Benedict XIII was elected in Avignon and perpetuated this Schism. Of the other Roman popes, Innocent VII, an Italian, was under the protection of the King of Naples, whose family benefited from this connection. Gregory XII was chosen by a Roman conclave of only fifteen cardinals under the express condition that should the rival pope in Avignon renounce his claim to the papacy, then Gregory would also resign to allow another, free election and end the Schism.

In 1398 the French withdrew their support for Benedict XIII, leading to the two popes, Benedict and the Roman Gregory XII, to start negotiations in 1406 to end the Schism by suggesting that both should resign allowing the election of a new pope to unify the church. These negotiations enabled the election of Alexander V at the Council of Pisa, in 1409, but Benedict and Gregory did not recognise the election and both refused to resign. In the event Alexander V died, in possibly suspicious circumstances, after ten months in the role and was succeeded by John XXIII, meaning there were still three popes, none of whom would give way to the others. Another Council was called to end the Schism, this one was in Constance and lasted four years, from 1414 to 1418. As before, the different countries in Europe supported different candidates; for example, Italians supported John XXIII, while England, Germany and France wanted all three popes to resign and for a new election altogether.

The Council finally elected Martin V (1417–31) to replace all three popes. Although Gregory XII had resigned in 1415, the papal seat was vacant until his death in 1417. However John XXIII tried to escape, and he eventually died in 1419 as cardinal bishop of Tusculum, and was buried in

Florence. Benedict XIII did not resign but was only recognised in Avignon and by Scotland who wanted the pope to allow the foundation of their first university in return for their support. Benedict died in 1422, after being ignored by everyone else, after Martin V's election.

The elevation of Martin V to the papacy is seen as the end of the Great Schism, but he faced the problems resulting from the split. The authority of the popes across Europe had been severely affected, especially in the power of the councils of the Church to dictate to the popes. This led to another schism between 1439 and 1449, when the pope Eugene IV (1431–47), a monk, tried to cancel the Council of Basle (1431), bringing him in direct conflict with those in the Church who wanted to enhance the power of the Church Councils to the detriment of the power of the popes. Eugene IV was forced into exile in Florence in 1434 and the Council elected the anti-pope Felix V in 1439. (Felix was in fact Amadeus, Duke of Savoy). As Felix had little support among the European rulers, Eugene IV was able to return to Rome after a gap of nearly ten years in 1443. Felix was finally persuaded to resign in 1449; he became a cardinal for his final two years, and died in 1451.

From the rule of Eugene IV onwards the power of the popes was seen to be compromised by the concessions both the Roman and anti-popes were forced to give to their supporters. Although the popes were able to exert their influence within the Councils after the election of Eugene, they were not able to do the same over the countries of Western Europe. From the mid fifteenth century the popes relied on their Papal States for their income, and they became much more focused on Italian inter-state rivalry.

<i>Title</i>	<i>Dates</i>	<i>Family Name</i>	<i>Origin</i>
Eugene IV	1431–17	Condulmaro	Venice
Nicholas V	1447–55	Parutecelli	Pienza
Calixtus III	1455–58	Borgia	Valencia
Pius II	1458–64	Piccolomini	Siena
Paul II	1464–71	Bembo	Venice
Sixtus IV	1471–84	Della Rovere	Genoa
Innocent VIII	1484–92	Cibo	Genoa
Alexander VI	1492–1503	Borgia	Valencia

Fifteenth-century popes

The popes after Eugene IV were known as the Renaissance popes, and almost all were Italians. They all resided in Italy, were often related and

were preoccupied with Italian affairs. This was not only due to domestic issues in Italy at the time, but also to the fact that other rulers had to a large degree shut them out of their kingdoms. These Renaissance popes were great patrons of the arts; for example, Sixtus IV founded the Sistine Chapel.

*Sixteenth-century
popes*

<i>Title</i>	<i>Dates</i>	<i>Family Name</i>	<i>Origin</i>
Pius III	1503	Piccolomini	Siena
Julius II	1503–13	Della Rovere	Genoa
Leo X	1513–21	Medici	Florence
Adrian VI	1522–23	Boeyens	Utrecht
Clement VII	1523–34	Medici	Florence
Paul III	1534–49	Farnese	Papal States
Julius III	1550–55	Del Monte	Rome

The popes in the sixteenth century were also mainly Italian, based in Rome and concerned with Italian politics. The last non-Italian pope before John Paul II, in 1978, was Adrian VI (1522–23), a Dutchman and tutor of the Emperor Charles V. Leo X (1513–21) excommunicated Martin Luther in 1521, Clement VII commissioned Michelangelo to paint the Sistine Chapel, and Paul III (1534–49) excommunicated Henry VIII of England after his declaration of supremacy over the Church in England and his break with the Church in Rome in 1534.

The Council of Trent, convened 1545–63, in Trent, northern Italy, was important, as it was called in response to the Protestant Reformations across Europe. This is seen as the start of the Counter-Reformation, and set out many key statements and clarifications for the next few centuries. Paul III was personally involved with the deliberations of the Council until his death in 1549.

While many of these later popes proved to be remarkable men, their talents were not exercised in relation to their religion or the affairs of the church, but in secular matters. They were not able to command Christendom in the way their predecessors had done; for example, the last papal tax in England was in 1375, and from the mid fifteenth-century popes could not make appointments to bishoprics in England. By the sixteenth century many countries already had a national church in many ways, and the power of the popes in the period of 1250 to 1550 is one of decline and insularity.

Jews

Although by definition the Jewish people were not part of the Roman Catholic Church, their experience in late medieval Europe was defined by the teachings of the Church and the religious attitudes they faced. Jewish communities always remained separate within medieval societies, and they were prohibited from many areas, professions and organisations. There were two main groups of Jewish communities in Europe, the Sephardic Jews in Iberia and the Ashkenazim in France/Germany.

Jewish people had lived across Europe for many centuries, and their experience before 1000 could be said to be peaceful. In this earlier period the Jews in Iberia were part of a flourishing community of Muslims, Christians and Jews, and in Muslim areas they could be found holding government positions. But the reforms undertaken by the Church from 1000, and its increasing power over Western Europe, meant that the experience of minority groups who did not conform to the Christian tradition suffered. These attitudes can be seen especially after the First Crusade (1096–c.1099), seen by some as a watershed in the relationships between Jewish and Christian communities. This Crusade to the Holy Land also included a tide of violence against Jews, especially in the Rhineland towns of Worms, Speyers and Mainz. The Crusaders also killed the Jews who remained in Jerusalem once this city fell to the Crusaders in 1099. These were examples of a pattern in Europe across the next five centuries.

The Jewish experience in Europe also suffered from the edicts of the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, when they were required to wear distinctive clothing, barred from public office and were not to be seen in public in the last three days of Easter (Good Friday to Easter Sunday). Innocent III, the pope who convened this Council, also issued a decretal (a papal decree) that the Jews should be placed in eternal servitude for the killing of Jesus. Not all popes were as entrenched in their views on Jews as Innocent III, but it did create an atmosphere in which bad treatment of Jews was tolerated.

As such the many Jewish communities across Europe were normally not able to own land and were barred from joining other organisations, such as guilds, as these were essentially Christian in focus. While able to act as merchants, they were finally able to create a niche as moneylenders. Christians were barred from making money from lending, known as the sin of simony, and thus a credit system was difficult to establish without the help of the Jewish community that was not governed by the same rules. But while they performed a social function that often allowed kings to go to

war against each other, this did mean that their perception by those to whom they lent money was often negative.

Jewish communities across Europe were generally expected or forced to be separate from Christian communities, and they often paid heavily in taxes or 'tributes' to continue to live in cities, to have their own abattoirs, synagogues and cemeteries. While there were some similarities in their treatment across Europe, there was not a coordinated action against them in this time period, action was often localised and in reaction to local events. While their religious practices were outside the Roman Catholic Church, another factor that affected their treatment was their perception in religious teachings as betrayers of Jesus, and this idea was also seen in many works of art. Their expulsions from various countries at different times can be linked to a popular perception of the Jewish people that was common across Western Europe. While the stories of the killing of Christian children to provide blood for their Passover bread can be discounted, it must be understood that at the time these stories were believed. This story spread from Norwich in England from 1144 across the whole of Europe, and was widely believed.

Another common misconception relating to Jewish communities occurred during the Black Death. In the middle of this terrible plague, stories emerged from Basle, Switzerland, that the deaths of so many people were linked to Jews poisoning wells. This rumour spread rapidly across Europe and led to the deaths of many innocent Jewish people, despite the pope Clement VI, issuing a Papal Bull in 1348 declaring the story to be false.

England

Communities of Jews lived in England after being invited into England by William the Conqueror after his Conquest in 1066, to continue their credit services to the king. As such these communities lived under the king's jurisdiction and protection. In this period they could hold land and were offered protection in any of the king's castles.

The experiences of different Jewish communities across the next three centuries were varied. From 1066 these communities had spread out from London to many of the major cities of England. It was in the reign of Edward I (r. 1277–1307) that their fortunes turned. Edward I and his wife, Queen Eleanor, had considerable problems with funds, both for normal expenses and for the campaigns the king commenced against the Scots and Welsh. The Jewish communities were seen as a target to improve this

situation and were increasingly restricted from areas previously available for generating an income. This led to them being less important in terms of providing the Crown with funds. Their final expulsion, in 1290, was the result of both their inability to offer funds to the Crown, their involvement (at some level) in a coin clipping scandal and Edward's ability to raise funds for war through his parliament. The king initially expelled all the Jews from the lands he held in Gascony, in 1287, and the last of the Jewish communities in England faced the same fate in 1290. These communities went to northern France.

France

The Jewish communities in France had a long history before 1300. Under Charlemagne (d. 814) they were considered his personal responsibility, and although proscribed in many areas of life, they were not persecuted until the eleventh century, from the reign of Robert II. They also suffered in the First Crusade (1096–99) in Rouen, where many were killed. This persecution continued sporadically in the next two centuries.

In 1306 there was the Great Exile of French Jews where *c.*100,000 were expelled by Philip VI, who then appropriated their property. This was probably inspired by his financial need rather than a theological imperative, as by 1315 they were allowed to return. This was only a temporary reprieve, though, as in 1394 Charles VI issued another ordinance demanding their removal from France.

As France in 1300 was not the united country we see in 1550, different regions dealt with their Jewish communities differently. The kings of France had jurisdiction over the Ile de France in 1300, the other areas acted differently, and generally it can be seen that Jews were not persecuted to the same degree for another hundred years. By the end of the fifteenth century there were very few Jewish communities in any area of France.

Spain

The history of the Jewish communities in Iberian Spain is a long one. The Iberian Peninsula was for many centuries a Muslim area, and from the eighth century a process known as the Reconquista gradually forced these communities out and led to the establishment of Christian kingdoms of Portugal, Castile, Aragon and Navarre (which was French). This process was completed in 1492, when the final Muslim kingdom of Grenada was defeated.

During the earlier centuries Jews lived in both communities, and in the southern Muslim areas, many Jews held government posts. In the northern Christian areas they were used as moneylenders under the protection of kings. After the completion of the Reconquista, the Jews in the areas controlled by Queen Isabella I of Castile (1451–1504) and her consort King Ferdinand II of Aragon (1452–1516), or also known as Ferdinand V of Castile, saw their position change. Early in their joint reign both Jews and Moors were offered an option to either convert to Christianity or be exiled. While many of both groups did leave the Iberian Peninsula, others converted. Jewish converts were known as Marranos or conversos, while those from a Muslim background were called Moriscos. Both groups faced considerable opposition and prejudice. In addition to this, the Inquisition also involved themselves with those who were deemed to be in opposition to the Catholic Church. The Inquisition was not new by the end of the fifteenth century, but its original function at its foundation in c.1231, was to root out heresy by the Cathars (a group of Christians who did not follow the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church). Ferdinand and Isabella asked the pope to instigate the Inquisition in their kingdoms, and by 1483 the leader, Tomas de Torquemada, began to investigate the conversos, who were seen as pseudo-Christians, being Jews in all but name. This led to hundreds of conversos being tortured and executed in Seville, before the same treatment was meted out to conversos in other parts of their joint kingdom. Eventually all Jews were expelled in 1492.

Germany

The various city-states that comprised medieval Germany had many and large communities of Jews. Until the First Crusade, Jews and Christians lived in relative harmony and mutual tolerance, but from this point Jews were seen as outsiders. There are many instances of Crusaders on their way to the Holy Land massacring whole Jewish communities on their way to Jerusalem, although those in Speyer was saved by the local bishop.

The Jewish experience in the late medieval period reflected the disunited nature of Germany. They received protection from the Holy Roman Emperors but this did not stop a pattern of either persecution or acceptance. The different city-states also offered charters to protect their Jewish communities, but the well poisoning stories during the Black Death affected the Jewish communities greatly. Many moved east in this period into Poland.

The fifteenth century saw the Jews linked as heretics in the crusades

against the Hussites and many were either killed or forced to convert to Christianity. The Jewish communities, while periodically persecuted never entirely left Germany, and when they were expelled from one city-state another welcomed them.

The sixteenth century offered little relief. Martin Luther attempted to persuade Jews to convert to Protestantism, but when this failed it started a new period of conflict with the Reformed religion as well as the established Roman Catholic Church.

Italy

The Jewish communities in Italy benefitted from several factors. Those in the north of Italy and Rome suffered fewer problems than those to the south. The northern Jewish communities were continuous, and if there were any expulsion these were not general but based on individual city-states. Many Jews who arrived from France and Germany after pogroms and expulsions in these countries augmented these original communities. The fourteenth and fifteenth centuries were periods of cultural activity for these communities, especially in periods when they received special protection from the pope. Urban V (1362–70) and Boniface IX (1389–1404) especially protected the Jews from the anti-Jewish activities of the Franciscan friars of this period. The activities of the friars determined where many of these communities lived, for example, in Ferrara and Mantua, where the Franciscan influence was not as high.

The sixteenth century was a problem for Jews living in the Naples area, as this came under Spanish control and therefore the influence of the Inquisition and Spanish attitudes were imported. Sicily expelled their Jewish communities in 1492, and Naples followed in 1510. The Papal States never acted in this way.

Secular/regular

While it can be seen that the Christian population of late medieval Europe could be split between the laity and the clergy, within the clergy there were also divisions. The clergy who operated the more familiar parish churches were very different from those who chose to live under a Rule, that is, monks and nuns, who were called Regulars. Those priests who lived in the community are called secular priests.

Monasticism

Monasticism was an important way of life for many in the Middle Ages. Not only were there considerable numbers of monks and nuns across the whole of Western Europe, they also owned a large proportion of land in each country. By 1300 monasticism already had a long history, but there were fewer new foundations after this date.

The word *monos* means alone in Greek, and originally monks were men who wished to live alone in contemplation. From the third century many men moved into the deserts of Egypt, not only to escape persecution, but also to find the peace in which to live a contemplative life, for example, St Antony (c.251–356). These early leaders attracted followers, who eventually set up communal houses where the inmates were known as cenobites. Once Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire under Emperor Constantine (c.272–337), the pressure for a separate life for those who wished to live a more contemplative and ascetic life increased.

The early centuries of Christianity saw several saints influential in this ascetic lifestyle. Orders that developed in Palestine and Syria in the fourth century were under the influence of St Basil (d. 379), and formed the basis of the monastic experience on the Eastern Orthodox religions of Greece, the Balkans and Russia. This was significant after the first schisms between the Eastern and Western churches after the sixth century. In the Latin areas of Western Europe, the influential figures of this period were St Augustine of Hippo (modern Algeria) (354–430), bishop of Hippo, who formed the basis of the ‘Rule of St Augustine’, and St Benedict (c.480–547), a monk of Monte Cassino, south of Rome, founder of the Benedictine Order. Their ‘Rules’ dealt with the need for contemplation and prayer and how their communities were to be ordered. The Augustinian Rule included details for groups of women who were included in this lifestyle from an early date.

After the sixth century the Rule of St Benedict became the basis on which all-subsequent monastic Rules and lives were based; it focused on the necessity for poverty, chastity, communal living, hard work and prayer. The Rule also emphasised obedience to the abbot of the community.

It should be noted that in the sixth and seventh centuries there was an alternative monastic tradition evolving from the Irish church. This monastic movement had a missionary focus, sending monks into Scotland and England from the sixth century under the influence of St Columba (521–97), who founded a community on the island of Iona. The Irish (or Celtic church) eventually lost out to the influence of the Roman Catholic Church at the Synod of Whitby, 664.

By the eleventh century the development of the Benedictine Rule had led

to the foundation of many monastic houses across central Europe. From this period a succession of different monastic orders emerged and while they were based on the Rule of St Benedict they also attempted a 'reform' in order to bring it back to its pure form. Hence the Cluniac movement emerged from 910 AD, originating from the Abbey of Cluny in the Duchy of Burgundy, which developed a 'family' of religious houses, under the authority of their motherhouse in Cluny. This and the subsequent Cistercian movement, based at the Abbey of Cîteaux, France, from 1098, were seen to be more austere than the Benedictines who, after many centuries, were perceived to have relaxed some of their more strict observances. While Benedictines and Cistercians believed in labour as a benefit to the soul, Cluniacs did not. They had 'lay persons' who performed the manual labour required in their houses. By 1250, the Benedictines had the largest number of foundations across Western Europe, and Cluniac houses had also been founded from Scotland into northern Spain and Portugal. The Cistercians (or white monks) were more widespread and numerous than Cluniacs, with 338 houses across Europe, from Sweden in the north to Spain and Portugal and east into Germany, Poland and Hungary.

Other smaller monastic movements were also founded. The Premonstratensian canons were founded in 1120, in Premontre, France, and were similar to Cistercians, farming vast estates. As canons but not monks they lived under the Cistercian Rule, but also went into the community to preach. Their houses were widespread across Europe, and a few were mixed, with monks/canons and nuns living side by side, sharing the same church, in the same way as the English order of Gilbertines.

The religious reformation of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, which saw the foundation of a vast number of religious houses of all types across Europe, was over by 1300. After this date the different orders of friars were at the vanguard of religious fervour, and these spread across Europe in large numbers. Friars differed from monks as they lived and preached in the community, and did not live separate, enclosed lives in monasteries. They were also started as a mendicant order, that is, beggars who took a vow of poverty and who were not meant to own property or other belongings. All friars were essentially preachers, and therefore they were concentrated in the urban centres. These different orders were popular from their foundation in the early thirteenth century, and it was not long before they became owners of churches.

The period 1300–1500 is not one of any significant changes or growth in monastic houses. The Black Death of 1348–50 especially decimated monastic communities across Europe, as they lived in close proximity to

each other, and many smaller houses were lost at this time. After the Black Death monasticism was still an important feature of the landscape of Western Europe, and the populations of Europe visited monastic shrines, endowed monasteries for prayers for the dead and also sought burial in their churches. It appears that many of the earlier strictness of the Rules of St Benedict or St Augustine were being relaxed, meat was eaten regularly, monks were not always confined in their monasteries and communal living was being replaced by more privacy, but this does not mean there was wholesale corruption. Of course there were instances of monastic misbehaviour, but generally the monks and nuns of this period led lives largely within their Rules. The only exception to this relaxation was the Carthusian Order, whose ascetic way of life appeared to be unchanged.

The sixteenth century changed this monastic landscape through the Reformation and other religious changes. This will be covered in the section of the Reformation below, but it is an important point to make that the period to 1500 was NOT a period when corruption meant that religious houses needed correction. There were still considerable numbers of religious men and women who led unremarkable lives under their Rules, and for the local populations there was not a clamour for their reform up to this date.

Church buildings

Across Europe in our period often the only stone building in a small town or village was the church. In larger towns other structures might also be made from material other than wood, but in these cases churches were still the largest building. Their distinctiveness was also increased by the use of towers and spires whose purpose was to aspire to heaven (and perhaps be taller than their neighbours). Churches were the places where worship in the form of services was undertaken for the Glory of God. These could take place with or without an audience, as churches were the community's 'powerhouse of prayer', and their commitment to divine service was an important role within every community.

The style of churches varied across Europe, dependent on local tradition, but there were some elements that were common to all. Churches were built along an East–West axis, with the eastern end of the church considered more spiritually important, as it was closer to Jerusalem, and it held the major or High Altar. Many churches, especially the larger ones, were cruciform in shape, representing the cross on which Jesus died. Thus the east end represented the head of Jesus, the transepts, or crossing,

represented his arms, while the nave represented his body.

Many earlier churches were based on buildings found in the Roman Empire, especially in the Forum of an urban centre, hence the term basilica is often used to describe churches. A Roman Basilica was originally the court building of a community, with aisles and pillars, and this style became the blueprint for many later churches. Some original Roman buildings were converted to churches: for example, a Temple of Mithras in Toulouse was the origin of the Cathedral Notre Dame du Taur. Roman bathhouses were also converted, most famously the Diocletian Baths in Rome (built 298–306) became two churches the basilicas of Santa Maria degli Angeli e dei Martiri (in the frigidarium) and the Church of San Bernardo alle Terme. Some Roman villas indicate that areas might have been converted to Christian worship, including the villa at Hinton St Mary, Dorset, England, which contains a mosaic of Jesus with the ChiRo symbol:



The period 1250 to 1550 is dominated by Gothic architecture across Europe. This followed on from the Romanesque (in England Norman) style of round arches and thick walls with small openings. Development of technology enabled buildings to have thinner walls and larger windows through the development of the pointed Gothic arch and these revolutionised buildings in our period. Developed in France, this technological breakthrough spread across Europe and was refined over the next three centuries; it is characterised by pointed arches and windows, along with ribbed vaults and flying buttresses (external supports for the thinner walls). These elements can also be seen in the architecture of palaces, castles and other large buildings in the same period. Over the period 1250 to 1550 there were refinements to this style, often on national lines, but the basic principles were the same.



Figure 2.2

St George's Chapel, Windsor Castle, built between 1475 and 1528

Source: © Graham Prentice/Alamy Stock Photo

Today Gothic architecture is described and defined using the surviving cathedrals and larger churches across Europe that demonstrate national characteristics. Any discussion of architecture across three centuries and the whole of Western Europe is too large a topic for this book, but the following can give some idea of the different emphases on architecture in the various countries or regions.

National architectural characteristics

France

Churches here generally had rounded east ends, called apsidal, with chapels in this area that radiate outwards. There are often ambulatories around the east end of the buildings. The transepts are smaller than, for example, in England, and are not common in the south of the country, where there are also fewer aisles. There is an emphasis on height inside the churches by using pillars. There is a general unified impression of these Gothic churches, especially in the west end, which have two towers.

England

English churches and cathedrals have distinctive square east ends. Generally the transepts are larger than in France, and some have double transepts. The east ends have ambulatories, and later Lady Chapels were built in this location. English cathedrals and Gothic churches are very diverse, and were built and remodelled over the centuries. There are often towers over the crossings and separate, freestanding bell towers.

Germany and central Europe

Cathedrals and larger churches here were often built in the French style, with a visual emphasis on height. But although they follow the French form with western towers, these are often larger and in an openwork style. Likewise the east ends were built in the French style, with ambulatories and radiating chapels, with few transepts. These churches were often wider and had an open aspect.

Italy

Italian churches were also built with apsidal east ends and radiating chapels. Their windows were generally smaller than those in the north of Europe. A distinctive feature of Italian churches was the use of mosaics and frescos for decoration, which were all polychrome, Mosaics were a feature over doors, and the frescos often covered ribs as well as walls. The churches had fewer columns than those to the north, and fewer towers. Domes rather than towers covered the crossing. As in England, freestanding towers were a feature.

Spain/Portugal

As only the north of Spain and Portugal was Christian at the early phase of Gothic architecture these features are concentrated in this area. To the south of the Iberian Peninsula many churches were influenced by Moorish architecture, and indeed some churches took over mosques after the Reconquista of the late fifteenth century.

The Gothic churches were similar to those in France but were generally wider. As in England there was more diversity of style than in France, and the east ends had chapels surrounding them. The clerestory windows were lower than elsewhere, and there was considerable use of pinnacles as decoration.

Scotland

There are few surviving medieval churches in Scotland, and architecture here represented the close ties to France, rather than England, in the later medieval period. The influence of the Low Countries can also be seen.

Low Countries

The French influence can be seen in these buildings, with rounded chancels and radiating chapels. These were generally cruciform, with an ambulatory. Churches often had single west towers made of brick where local conditions could not easily supply sufficient stone.

Church use

Today few buildings survive from this earlier period unchanged, especially churches. Even though their function did not change, as they were always the setting for the liturgy, there were some changes in fashion. The increase in the number of Lady Chapels, dedicated to the Virgin Mary, was a feature of the time period, along with the popularity of her cult. This interest can be seen as the Virgin Mary gained a family, her mother was St Anne and was often depicted teaching the Virgin to read; Mary also obtained a coat of arms.

Some churches were also used as settings for courts, both church and lay. Churches were often the largest building in a community, and as such were used for some secular duties.

Church courts

The Roman Catholic Church had its own canon law, which was applied in Western Europe alongside the laws of each kingdom and as such was a unique system that worked across borders, the only truly international organisation of its time. Canon law was also applied equally to all people, regardless of status, sex or social standing. By 1300 canon law was a sophisticated system, with its own canon lawyers and hierarchy, all subject to the pope's authority.

Canon law was based on judgments of the popes on certain subjects that came to their attention. These judgments were issued in letters called decretals, and were transmitted to judges who used them in similar cases. By 1300 these had been organised into several collections, the first being in the 1140s by a monk, Gratian, in Bologna, in a document known as the

Decretum. This was added to in 1234 as the rise in the number of decretals issued by popes increased. This newer work by Raymond of Pennafort was used alongside the *Decretum*, with further collections being added in 1298, the *Liber Sextus* and the *Clementines* (named after the pope who sponsored them Clement V) in 1317. These collections formed the basis of canon law for our period, all under the ultimate authority of the popes and were known collectively as the *Corpus Juris Canonici*.

Canon Law covered almost all of human life, and although it could be seen as having very harsh penalties, these were not generally implemented in their most rigorous form. Many elements could also be dispensed with at the orders of the pope. For example, there were degrees within which it was forbidden to marry, known as the rules of consanguinity. In reality when people wished to marry within these bounds a dispensation could be obtained, although these particular ones decreased in number after 1330. Dispensations for these and other matters could be obtained through the church courts.

The ecclesiastical courts were hierarchical and will be considered in this way. It should be noted that cases could be moved between the courts as needed. A plaintiff in a lower court could appeal to a higher court if unhappy with a verdict.

Papal curia

This was the papal court in both senses. It was the court surrounding the pope in temporal style as well as the legal court for canon law. This was based in Rome (except in the period of the Avignon papacy when it was with the body of the pope).

Cases that were brought to the papal curia normally cost a great deal of money, and often took a very long time to resolve.

Consistory court

These were headed by a bishop or archbishop and dealt with issues arising from their province or diocese. Generally these met in the seat of the diocese, or in the case of the archbishop of Canterbury in London, not in Canterbury. These courts heard and proved wills, which were under the jurisdiction of the church for many centuries.

Archdeacon's court

These were the local courts. It was here that cases of adultery, sexual sin

and liturgical matters were dealt with. Attendance at church was expected every Sunday, and cases of absenteeism and working on the Sabbath can be found in these church records, along with complaints from parishioners of priests who did not perform the sacraments correctly. A study of these records can give a real sense of community in the medieval period.

Reformations

The landscape of Europe changed radically in the sixteenth century. Before this date the authority of the Roman Catholic Church was not seriously challenged, and any heresies or dissension, for example the Lollard movement in England (c.1382–1414) and the Cathars in the Languedoc region of France (c.1140–1229), were suppressed, often ruthlessly. Whether these movements were the first stirrings of the later reformation of the Roman Catholic Church is matter for much debate. What is clear is that the early sixteenth century saw a sustained movement for reform in the Catholic Church that by the end of this century saw the religious landscape of Western Europe transformed.

In 1500 it is doubtful whether the reforms and fractures in the Church could be foreseen. But this was a period of insular popes, mainly Italian, who were at this date rebuilding St Peter's Basilica in Rome in the style seen today. The Reformation needs to be seen in its early inception as 'reform' not fracture. The challenge to the Church in the early part of this century is traditionally, and with justification, given to the actions of Martin Luther, a German friar. In 1517 in response to his disgust at the corruption he saw in Rome, and especially in the Church's selling of Indulgences (remission of time spent in Purgatory in return for money) he is believed to have nailed his objections in the Ninety-Five Thesis to the door of Wittenberg Cathedral in October 1517. Whether these were nailed there is not certain, but what is known is that these theses formed the basis of an academic argument and while copies were distributed across Germany, they were intended to be an examination of the Church rather than an outright assault on its teaching. Luther's subsequent move away from traditional thinking on the nature of salvation, where grace could only come from God and was not due to good works that pleased God, were formed by 1518. After much debate, the Church declared his teaching heretical and he was excommunicated in 1521, after defending himself at the Diet of Worms, a meeting of the Holy Roman Empire. At this date he also translated the New Testament into German, a start of the movement towards vernacular Bibles in the Reforming movement, as the Bible was seen as the source of

Christian truth and previously had only been available Latin versions. The issue of the Bible in the vernacular language was an important issue for the Reformation movements.

Luther himself played no great part in this reforming movement after 1525, when his followers took up his teachings and challenges. Both academic and non-academic groups developed his original ideas after 1517/8, but they soon split along different lines of interpreting the exhortation of Jesus in the Last Supper, whether it was his body and blood or a symbolic recreation of these elements. But it must be seen that while Luther was the catalyst of the Reform movement and a leading player in the division of Western Christianity for the first time in 1500 years, he was very quickly side-lined. The reform movement grew rapidly in Germany after 1520, and their ideas spread across Europe, initially underground in many countries.

While Roman Catholicism remained strong in many areas, for example, Spain and Italy, other countries across Europe developed their own strands of reformed religion. The movement quickly broke into sects often along national lines.

- *Lutherism (Germany and Scandinavia)* – based on teachings of Luther and his early followers.
- *Zwingli (Switzerland)* Huldrych Zwingli (1484–1531) – leading proponent of the Swiss Reformation dated to 1522. Zwingli preached on the value of the Gospels and against the same type of abuses of the Roman Catholic Church as Luther, such as indulgences and clerical celibacy. From 1524 images were removed from local churches and masses were replaced by a simple communion. Support for his movement spread from Zurich to other cantons, although he did engage in arguments with other Lutherans. His movement, which never became a church, was eventually merged with the Calvinists, in 1561.
- *Calvinism (Scotland, France, Netherlands, American Colonies, Germany and Central Europe)* – based on teachings of John Calvin (1509–64), a French lawyer who fled to Basle for his religious beliefs. He wrote the first Protestant treatise in 1536, *Institutes of Christian Religion*, although there is some blending of the ideas of Calvin himself and his followers in this period. John Knox (1513–72) was influenced by Calvin and took his teachings to Scotland.

- *Anabaptists (Switzerland, Southern Germany and Moravia)* – rejected infant baptism and their other more radical beliefs made them targets for persecution in Switzerland. The movement found a home in Moravia where they developed their own ideology, especially in common ownership of goods and modelled on the primitive church of first centuries of Christendom, under Jakob Hutter. This, of all the Reformed churches, was persecuted by both Catholics and Protestants for their radical beliefs. Anabaptists were the spiritual ancestors of groups such as Quakers and Baptists and believed in the complete separation of state and Church.

- *Anglicanism (England)* – the Reformation in England was both political and spiritual. In 1534 Henry VIII (r. 1509–47) created the Anglican Church by breaking with Rome, despite previously having been awarded the title Defender of the Faith (*Fidei Defensor*) by the pope in 1521 for a written defence of the Roman Catholic faith after Luther's excommunication. Henry VIII issued the Thirty-Nine Articles in 1538, after agreement with the German Lutheran princes, but he prevaricated over the extent of Reformed religion, for example, the Bible in English, until his death in 1547. His son, Edward VI (r. 1547–53), brought in the *Book of Common Prayer* in 1549, and moved England firmly into the Reformed religious community, but these were overturned on his death in 1553, by his sister Mary I, (r. 1553–58) a staunch Roman Catholic. Their last sibling, Elizabeth I (r. 1558–1603) ascended to the throne in 1558, and took a more central ground, where the Anglican Church contained a mixture of both Catholic and Protestant features. It is still the official state religion of England.

- *France* – at the Reformation France split into areas of both Protestantism and Catholicism. The Reformation in France up to 1550 was a time when the Protestants began to call themselves Huguenots and were influenced by Calvinist theology. The Roman Catholic kings Francis I (r. 1515–47) and Henry II (r. 1547–59) started to prosecute these Protestants, many of whom fled to Geneva. The Reformed religion did not appeal to the whole country, but had many followers. It was from 1562 that the kings instigated serious persecution of Huguenots in France, leading to mass emigration in the seventeenth century.

- *Spain/Portugal* – these two countries remained staunchly Roman

Catholic throughout the Reformation of the early sixteenth century thanks to the efforts of the Inquisition, which was very strong in Spain. An aspiring reformed movement grew influenced by the work Juan de Valdés, *Dialogue on Christian Doctrine*, in 1529, but when this work was declared heretical in 1531 his followers were quickly oppressed and Valdes moved to Naples, Italy. The Reformation never challenged Portugal, and the Inquisition here also dealt swiftly with any dissent.

Dating the Reformation is therefore very difficult as it was a process not an event.

Counter Reformation

A Roman Catholic Counter Reformation followed the Reformation under the auspices of Pope Paul III (1534–49), who convened the Council of Trent in 1545. This Council was called to deal with the Protestant Reformation and in the view of many historians was convened too late. The Council reaffirmed the doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church and was a springboard for significant tension and bloodshed between the Protestant and Catholic Churches, especially in France.

Europe today can still be split between the areas where either the Reformed or Roman Catholic Churches have greater influence, and there is little difference in these areas from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

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3

Monarchy

Western Europe in 1300 had a series of kingdoms, where kings ruled AND reigned. Kingship in this period was very personal and the personality of a king (or queen) had a direct impact on their realms. This was especially the case should the monarch be weak or a child, and in these circumstances there were often problems in their kingdoms, as they were vulnerable to usurpation, murder and a lack of security and justice in the realm. Foreign policy was very often a personal decision of the king, and could often be based on personal enmity and family relationships.

Kings were expected to rule for the public good and in accordance with natural law, that is, the customs of their particular community. Thus, if rulers ruled wisely it was incumbent on their subjects to comply with their rules and laws. Ruling was in most cases a mutual relationship, between the ruler and the ruled. But while they may have held the same title, that of king, there were, perhaps surprisingly, differences in the nature of kingship in this period. There were some common features: the recognition of the title by the Church, the need to provide security of the realm and justice within it. But equally, the *nature* of kingship varied, especially in terms of inheritance of the title and the extent of their power.

What must be stressed when considering medieval kingship was the personal element. The character, ambitions and preoccupations of each ruler, including the few queens in this period, shaped the realm, its interactions with neighbours, its legislative programmes and ultimately its fate. If a realm had a king who was too weak, old, young or inept the realm could suffer as the administrative and political systems could break down and fracture. These periods of weakness can be demonstrated in most

realms across Western Europe at different times. For example, Scotland in the fifteenth century had a series of minor (young) kings, which seriously weakened the authority of this role. Likewise, the ‘madness’ of Henry VI of England (1421–71), weakened the throne to the point that a civil war, known as the Wars of the Roses, took place. This led to the death of this king at the hands of his rival, Edward IV (1442–83) in 1471. As kingship was so personal, the inevitable rise and fall of dynasties, the success of countries in both war and peace, can be intimately linked to the character and success of their king. This is why so many histories of this period concentrate on kings and their actions; this is not just a throwback to the traditional male, elite histories of the past but because kings *really* mattered.

Western Europe also had rulers who were not kings, such as the German princes and the powerful dukes in Burgundy and those within France. In the French example, their kings were their overlords, but they ruled within their own dominions. These shall be considered in more detail in [Chapter 4](#).

Papacy and the divine right of kings

Kings were not only national figures, but also international ones, and the support of the pope was considered important. By 1300 this papal relationship was under strain, as the kings of France and England were challenging the power of the popes to intervene in their own kingdoms. This relationship between popes and kings had been brought into sharp focus by the papal bull *Unam Sanctam*, issued by Pope Boniface VIII (c.1230–1303), in 1302, in an attempt to impose papal authority on the different kingdoms of the period. It illustrates how far these kingdoms were moving away from papal authority in the temporal realm. *Unam Sanctam* aimed to clarify the relative positions of kings and popes, by stating that the pope, as direct heir of St Peter, had authority over all areas of life, both spiritual and temporal. In the pope’s view, while kings had temporal power, this was only to be regarded as granted to them by the Church, who was their judge.

Boniface was not successful; his bull did not achieve the desired results for the popes, and these events revealed the changing nature of the power of the popes in relation to the rising authority of kings in their own realms. Both Philip IV of France and Edward I of England wanted the power to dispense patronage by appointing their own bishops, to gain control of their national church and to be able to tax the clergy in their own kingdoms. *Unam Sanctam* represented the failure of the medieval papacy to exert

control over temporal lords, and denoted the final attempt by medieval popes to exert control within these secular kingdoms. It also reflected the emerging idea of nationhood: a feature of our period, when national identities solidified, demonstrated partly by the independence of national churches. This was not to say that subsequent popes were powerless; they still had influence, but the efforts of Philip IV, especially, limited the power of the popes within national churches.

While there were efforts to limit the intervention of the papacy in national churches, kings still needed the recognition of the church to validate their title. This can be most clearly demonstrated in their coronation services (see below). There was a close relationship between kings and the Church, especially as many major church figures also held offices of state, but there were also many clashes. Kings after 1300 were increasingly able to direct many areas of their national churches, through the appointment of archbishops and bishops for example, and these men often acted in national capacities, with no hint of any possible conflict of interest.

The Divine Right of Kings can be seen as a consequence of this emergence of national identity expressed through the person of the king. In this belief, the right to rule was conferred by God directly to a ruler, making it a sin to oppose their will. This doctrine was evolving in our period, to become a significant factor in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in countries where absolute monarchy existed, for example, France and Portugal. Absolute monarchs, who believed in the Divine Right of Kings, ruled without the need to consult any parliament and were developing their powers in our period.

There were important contemporary writers who discussed and described the nature of kingship in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries and not always in the same way. The English example was Sir John Fortescue (c.1394–1479), a royal judge, who wrote his observations on the nature of monarchy. He divided it into two types: limited and absolute, describing the English situation as a limited monarchy, where the realm was ruled by a combination of king and parliament, as opposed to France, where the king ruled alone. These observations were written in the context of English law and as an instruction manual for Edward, Prince of Wales, son of Henry VI (1421–70). In France, Philippe de Commines (1447–1511) wrote his memoirs on the court of Louis XI (1423–83) and commented on French statecraft. These have both been used as primary sources for the period. Commines was a diplomat, not a lawyer, and therefore his view of kingship was different from Fortescue's. Lastly, the writings of Niccolò

Machiavelli (1469–1527) have attained a place in folklore, but he actually wrote treatises on how to govern based on his experience in the Italian States. His works included descriptions of the government of Florence for Pope Leo X, and also criticisms of the Medici regime and belief in the republic system that led to his imprisonment. It should be noted that the study of the nature of kingship is not confined to the modern period.

Primogeniture

By 1300 across all of Europe, including the Scandinavian kingdoms, it was understood that marriage and monogamy conferred rights to any children, especially sons, who were all acknowledged as legitimate. By this date the idea of primogeniture had also been accepted to some degree as well. This was a system in which the inheritance of the father went intact to the eldest son. This ended the practice, often seen in the preceding century in Scandinavia, of splitting a king's inheritance between surviving sons. Keeping a country intact through primogeniture was seen as important, and it prevented some (though not all) disputes over territory between siblings. This concept was applied slightly differently across Europe; in Hungary, for example, the crown was passed to a king's younger brothers before his sons, so the kingdom remained intact, and therefore marriage and its progeny were not the priority in terms of inheritance. This interpretation of primogeniture also ensured that kings were adults, not young children. Hungary also allowed women to take the throne in their own right, not just as consorts, although they were crowned as kings, '*Rex*', not queens, '*Regina*'.

When primogeniture was applied, kings provided for their other sons through alternative means, which might include marriage to heiresses. Likewise, primogeniture also passed the rights to a grandson of a king, when a son predeceased his father, rather than to any surviving sons. This was seen in the accession of Richard II of England (1367–1400) in 1377 as a nine-year-old boy, despite having a surviving adult uncle, Edmund Langley, Duke of York (1341–1402).

While primogeniture passed the right to a throne through male heirs, the role of female heirs was also significant, and applied differently across Europe. Some countries, like France, did not recognise any rights to the throne that came through female lines. This situation, which was only tested in 1317 by the Estates General, declared women could not ascend to the throne of France, nor could they transmit any claim to the throne. This was justified later by the study of the ancient Salic Law by lawyers. In

other countries where females were not explicitly debarred from the throne or transmitting any claims, their rights were often subordinate to those of male lines.

However, primogeniture was not applied strenuously in many cases, and some countries had ‘elected’ kings. While there might be a presumption in favour of an eldest son, kingship needed to be affirmed by the nobles of the realm or, in the case of Denmark, by their parliament, called the *Ting* or *Thing*. This was not an election as might be understood today, as electors were only the elite in society. The king of Germany, also known as the Holy Roman Emperor, was one example of this system, where the princes of the various provinces ‘elected’ their kings, through an electoral college. This system allowed those entitled to elect an emperor/king to use the title ‘Prince Elector’, and became a significant rank in Germany.

There were other countries where the blend between primogeniture and election of kings was mixed, such as Poland, where the eldest son was not always guaranteed the throne, and also Norway. Here the idea of primogeniture was not established until the thirteenth century, and although applied in principle, by 1450 these kings were also ‘elected’.

The status of the eldest son as heir was also denoted by specific titles in many countries, even if election did take place.

<i>Country</i>	<i>Title of heir to throne</i>
England	Prince of Wales
France	Dauphin
Germany	King of the Romans
Scotland	Duke of Rothesay
Castile	Prince of Asturias
Aragon	Prince of Girona
Navarre	Prince of Viana
Norway	Crown Prince
Sweden	Crown Prince
Portugal	Prince of Beira
Denmark	Crown Prince
Poland	Crown Prince

Context

Kings in the period 1300 to 1550 had to contend with many outside issues and events that affected their realms and their ability to rule. Generally, they were reactive to events rather than proactive. Pan-European events,

such as the Black Death (1347–50) and its aftermath, affected kingship in personal terms, some died from plague and others lost children, but it did not fundamentally change its nature. The issues concerning warfare were more likely to affect kingship, as kings were often judged by their contemporaries in this context. A successful king protected his realm, and in our period there were many external threats to kingdoms, not only from the rising power of the Ottoman Turks to the East, but also around issues such as territory disputes, dynastic challenges and conversion to Roman Catholicism, for example, The Hundred Years' War between England and France (1337–1453), and the Reconquista of the Iberian Peninsula of the fifteenth century. All of these required military efforts, and kingship was a factor in their success. By the end of this period the practice of kings leading armies in the field was in decline, but had not died out completely.

During the Avignon Papacy (1305–78) and the Great Schism (1378–1415) it was the different monarchies across Europe that enabled these events to continue through different factions and alliances (See [Chapter 2](#)). While monarchs had gained much more control over the Church in their own kingdoms, these events surrounding the papacy still affected them all, as the papal curia represented the highest court in Western Europe.

Context is always an important consideration when looking at kingship. The relative weakness or strengths of kings were due to many factors, not just personality.

Warfare

A feature of kingship in this period was the expectation of and evidence for kings leading in war. This was a fundamental matter for kings, and they often led their armies in person, especially in the earlier period.

Medieval warfare was closely linked to chivalry and, as kings were seen as the ultimate expression of chivalry, they had to act in a certain way. Warfare and chivalry will be dealt with in later chapters in more detail, but in the context of the nature of kingship they cannot be ignored. The oath made by kings at their coronation, implicitly stated that they would defend their kingdoms, and this defence meant offensive campaigns against neighbours as well as defence against aggressors. Often the contemporary and historical verdict on kings of this period related directly to their success or failures in this area.

Warfare was expensive, and kings had to finance it in various ways. English kings often needed to ask their parliament for taxation to fight campaigns and this led to the limited monarchy as described by Fortescue.

Other monarchs used loans from their barons or nobility to pay for these conflicts. As warfare was so endemic in this period, its financing became critical and could be said to shape the nature of kingship in each realm. The English kings needed parliament to provide taxes beyond subsidies (for example, on wool imports and exports), the Aragonese crown took out loans and repaid them with pensions from newly acquired territory in the Balearics, while the French crown developed new ways of taxing a population that already suffered from warfare in their vicinity, as well as devaluing their currency on regular occasions.

Traditional histories of this period often concentrate on this factor of medieval kingship, and while it is important, it was not the only factor in determining medieval monarchies.

Lifestyle

While it may be that kings struggled for money to fight their wars, they still were able and expected to live in considerable splendour commensurate with their status at other times. Most kings had more than one palace or castle and lived a peripatetic life, moving from residence to residence normally on an annual cycle. As the year was broken into divisions based on the Church's calendar, certain events for kings were also tied to this calendar. The major religious feasts often coincided with special events, such as crown wearing, while the more pleasurable events such as hunting were also in the calendar at specific times of the year.

Many of the royal castles and palaces were old even by 1300, and they often required rebuilding and remodelling during a king's reign. Many have not survived, especially in France, where many older palaces were torn down and rebuilt in Renaissance style in the seventeenth century. These palaces/ castles needed to hold a great number of people, as kings travelled with large entourages, called their court. In addition, local people would attend court when the king was in the area, as he would dispense judgments and king's justice during his stay. For these reasons the briefness of these visits was beneficial, as kings would consume any local duty due to them in the form of food, depleting local supplies. In addition, this number of people meant that the residence would become dirty very quickly, and this lifestyle gave caretakers a chance to clean palaces before the next visit.

Royal courts were not only the king's home but also where state occasions were undertaken. Foreign ambassadors were received here and often travelled with the court for periods of time. Courts were the hub of learning and patronage of the arts, music and literature, as well as

diplomacy. Royal courts often hosted foreign royalty or nobility who were in exile from their homeland. These people often appeared at these courts for assistance and validation of their claims, along with financial resources and troops. The future Henry VII of England (r. 1485–1509) spent most of his early life in such a position in the courts of France and Brittany, exiled from England due to the politics of the Wars of the Roses in England. This was not an uncommon situation, and given that many royal women married abroad, this situation could often be a family reunion.

The kingly households also were the seat of the highest court in the land, the king's court, and petitioners to the king would attend from all stations in life. Many documents relating to courtly life and culture have survived from our period, demonstrating the richness of dress, both of the palaces and people. There were national differences in these royal courts, and the personality of the kings and queens heavily influenced this culture. Books of etiquette in these households have survived giving an insight into the daily life of these establishments, where issues of precedence and honour became very important and often had to be judged on by the monarch.

Kings were rarely alone, even when on hunting expeditions when they may have been accompanied only by a few select companions. Their court included nobility who had roles in the kingdom, others hoping for such posts, clerks and clergy who played both a spiritual and temporal role. There were equally a large number of ladies present, including the queen and her ladies in waiting – her companions. There were also considerable numbers of royal servants of all ranks. Royal children rarely lived in the same space as their parents, often being based in one palace with their own household, and only occasionally visiting their parents or being visited by them.

Kings did have intimate friends in these circles, often childhood companions, not always of the highest rank. These intimates could sometimes cause problems if they were seen to exert undue influence over the monarch. An extreme example of this was seen in England in the example of Edward II (1284–1327), whose first favourite, Piers Gaveston, was accused of exercising undue influence over Edward when the latter was still prince; Gaveston was exiled by Edward's father, Edward I. This pattern repeated itself when Edward II was king, and Gaveston was eventually tried for treason by the English nobility and executed. Edward II then compounded this situation by coming under the influence of more favourites, the Despensers, father and son (Hugh the Elder and Hugh the Younger). The situation eventually led to Edward's deposition by his wife, Isabella of France (1295–1358) and her lover Roger Mortimer, Earl of

March (1287–1330) and to Edward's eventual murder, in 1327. As power was concentrated in a king, those who were physically close to a king could expect to benefit from this relationship. A good king managed to balance these relationships with those of the nobles, who felt they had an ancient right to consult and advise a king. Edward II, sadly, was never able to do this, which upset his nobility, who were then able to exact their own revenge.

Usurpations of a king were not common (except for England in our period) and were considered a sin in many ways, as kings were anointed (see below) and therefore their role was sanctified. But it did happen. Perhaps it is surprising, in a period of such personal kingship, that there were not more usurpations, especially when kings suffered from illness, including mental illness, and infirmity in old age. More often in these circumstances, regencies or councils took over the government of a kingdom in the king's name, rather than replace the king himself.

Coronations

The point at which an heir became a king was generally immediately after the death of the previous monarch, except in France, when this was deemed to be when the old king was placed in his grave. The phrase 'the king is dead, long live the king' is relevant here, as the state of kingship itself did not end, only the person to whom it referred changed at this point. In most European countries, the status of kingship also went through a religious ceremony to confirm the monarchy, with often ancient rituals, known as the coronation.

Coronations were not new by 1300, and many of the symbols and rituals used were inherited from earlier times. This ceremony indicated that the king was sanctified in his role by the Church, and that he received God's grace to take on the position. These rituals therefore reaffirmed and validated the relationship of the Church and monarch while also being political events where the power and authority of the king was acknowledged. Coronations were large public events where the Church and public, including nobility and other classes of people, overtly affirmed their loyalty to the Crown and its incumbent. Coronations often required senior nobles to make public vows of loyalty to the king, at the same time as kings made vows to their countries.



Figure 3.1

The Coronation of Henry IV of England (Detail of a miniature from the *Grandes Chroniques de France* by Jean Froissart), c.1470

Source: © Heritage Image Partnership Ltd/Alamy Stock Photo

Coronations did survive past the Reformation in most countries, albeit in a slightly modified form. In Catholic countries and in the pre-Reformation period, coronations always included a mass, and it was this element that was eliminated for Protestant rites, for example, in Scotland. In England, the coronation of Protestant rulers also abolished the mass but still continued the ceremony in Latin until the seventeenth century. Both pre- and post-Reformation services referred to the ‘sacred’ element of the service, the anointing by holy oil, as the transmission of God’s grace to the ruler.

Ritual/anointment

Coronations across Europe often followed very similar patterns and used similar regalia. Kings would enter the designated church (see below) and process to the area around the High Altar. This frequently followed a public

procession outside the church. The regalia used often had national significance and were presented to the king, including an orb, representing the Christian world, a sword to signify their upholding of justice and a sceptre to symbolise their kingly power. The sceptre was in the same style as rods issued by kings to their officials, which were broken and cast into a grave to symbolise the end of their service on the death of a king. Crowns, often ancient and with national significance, were finally placed on the head of the monarch by a senior churchman.

While the crowning might appear to be the most important act within these services, in fact it was the anointing of a monarch with oil that was the most significant. The oil was religiously important, and monarchs were traditionally anointed in five places, the chest/breast, top of the head, between the shoulders, inside the elbows and on the palms of hands. This anointing was in the Christian tradition and was related to baptism, which is an anointing with water; both are reflections of Solomon's anointing in the Old Testament. It was seen (and still is) as a link between the ruler and God. It must be noted however, that in Portugal, the anointing was of secondary importance to the practice of acclaiming the king three times by the congregation.

Monarchs also took public oaths during these services, promising to protect their realms and to uphold justice. In addition, rings were often dedicated, along with special clothes being worn after the anointing. Canopies were often used for processions and shielded the anointing, the most significant part of the service. These can still be seen on seals of the period, for example, the seals of Philip V of France (1293–1322).

Depending on the venue used for these coronations, different locations within a church were seen as significant at various times in the service, which was not static and often included processions and movement around a church. In France, after the crowning their kings were led to a throne placed on the rood screen of the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Reims. In England, monarchs could retire to the chapel of Edward the Confessor in Westminster Abbey, if needed, although the throne itself was located in front of this chapel. Feasts followed coronation ceremonies, and these could be very elaborate and often included gifts of food or drink to local populations. In London for example, it was a tradition for wine to be sent down conduits that normally carried water.

It should be noted that popes also went through this type of ceremony in St Peter's Church, Rome, using the papal tiara.

Scotland	Scone Abbey or Stirling	Recitation of genealogy of monarch was part of the service
England	Westminster Abbey, London	Crown of Edward the Confessor (d. 1065) used until destroyed in the seventeenth century
France	Notre Dame Cathedral, Reims	Crown of Charlemagne (d. 814) used but destroyed in French Revolution
Castile	Toledo	Coronation not performed after 1379 (John I) instead monarch appeared in <i>Cortes</i> (parliament)
Aragon	Zaragoza	Performed by Archbishop of Tarragona
Portugal		Not recorded, but papal bulls of 1428 and 1436 allowing anointment of kings indicates an interest in reviving this part of ceremony
Holy Roman Empire/ Kingdom of Germany	Rome until 1440, Aachen until 1530, later Frankfurt	Crowned by popes not archbishops
Sweden (Part of Kalmar Union)	Stockholm or Uppsala	Legitimised elected kings
Norway (Part of Kalmar Union)	Nidaros Cathedral, Trondheim	Coronations for kings as part of Kalmar Union meant coronations in each country, none in Norway after Denmark-Norway union – 1524
Denmark (Part of Kalmar Union)	Lund Cathedral, Lund or St Mary's Copenhagen after 1448	Elected kings acclaimed in parliament (<i>Thing</i>) before coronation
Hungary	Szekesfervar Basilica	Burial place of St Stephen, queens regnant were crowned as kings

Queens

There were relatively few queens regnant in our period. Mostly queens were consorts of kings, and as such had no real power unless they acted as

regents for their children, after an early death of their husbands. Some women did become queens in their own right, but the conditions for this varied across Europe. France, for example, resorted to ancient Salic Law to stop females not only ascending the throne but also transmitting a claim. This was in direct contrast to Castile where queens could rule and reign, but only if there were no brothers. Hungary allowed women to ascend the throne, but they had to be crowned as kings, not queens.

The biggest problem when women ascended the throne was her marriage. While it was accepted that women became queen consorts, the role of a husband of a queen regnant was not so clear, although there was the normal imperative to produce an heir. The marriage of Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castile in the fifteenth century, demonstrated this issue. They ruled their countries jointly, and Aragon and Castile acted in a concerted way, but Ferdinand was not king of Castile, and when Isabella died in 1504, their daughter Joanna ascended the throne; it was not left to Ferdinand. In fact, he had to act for his daughter who had mental health issues. These Crowns were only joined, in the person of Joanna, after Ferdinand's death in 1516.

In contrast, the husband of Margaret I of Hungary (1371–95), Sigismund (1368–1437), continued to rule after her death. Each country decided on this matter on an individual basis. If a consort to a queen – normally a foreigner – outlived the queen, it could be that an outsider could rule the country, especially if children were minors or the king had been crowned. Various methods were undertaken to ensure this did not happen, including contracts and making husbands only prince consorts. This was the largest barrier to women becoming queens, and it was an issue into the sixteenth century, where Elizabeth I of England (1533–1603) remained single throughout her long reign. Her sister's earlier marriage to Philip II of Spain (1516–98) had caused problems after his efforts to be made king of England. The issue of queens regnant and their spouses may have been one reason why efforts were made to avoid women coming to the throne, not only due to their lower social status.

Of the few women who became queens, we can see that some were very successful in more masculine areas, such as Isabella of Castile who led her armies against the Moors of Iberia. Others were successful in the more traditionally feminine areas of charity, culture and piety, for example, Hedwig (Jadwiga) of Poland (1374–99), who was later canonised.

The issue of women monarchs and their ability to transmit claims to thrones was a nation-by-nation decision based on custom and events. In a dynastic dispute these female claims could be promoted or discounted

according to the relative strength of different royal lines, and this occurred across Western Europe at different times.

Kingdoms

England

The period 1300 to 1550 was a very interesting and violent one for kingship in England. During this period there were thirteen kings, of which four were usurped: Edward II (1284–1327), Richard II (1367–1400), Henry VI (1421–71) and Edward V (1470–83). In fact Henry VI was deposed twice by his successor Edward IV (1442–83), in 1461 and again in 1471. In addition four kings ascended the throne as minors Edward III (1312–77), Richard II, Henry VI and Edward V. These events led to conflicts between supporters of each faction in the case of usurpation, and tension in the councils that ran the kingdom during minorities. Yet the notion of kingship was still resilient, as successful and strong kings either preceded or followed the weaker ones. The English monarchy has been described as a limited one, which sought the opinion and validation of Parliament as well as the nobility in times of crisis.

Throughout this period the principle of primogeniture was applied, even in the cases of children ascending the throne when there were other adult members of the Blood Royal alive. Some kings were usurped due to weaknesses of various kinds, especially a perceived inability to protect territory. Kings were expected to be strong leaders, dispensing justice and protecting the realm. When they favoured certain people over those nobles who considered their role to be that of confidante of the king, trouble ensued; the example of Edward II and his favourites has already been mentioned. The exact nature of these relationships has never been clear, but their influence over the king was immense. In addition, these favourites received titles and wealth from the king, and upset their noble rivals. This situation also coincided with military failure; for example, Edward II's disastrous loss against the Scots at the Battle of Bannockburn in 1314 was a contributory factor in his eventual usurpation by his wife. This is an example of the combination of events and personalities that contributed to the kingship crises in England.

Another issue for the English kings of this period was the endogamy practised by the English royal and noble families. Between the time of Henry II (1207–72) and that of Henry VII (1457–1509) these families rarely married outside of England, even kings did not always contract

foreign marriages. Thus most of the English nobility carried a degree of the Blood Royal and felt it their duty and right to advise the king. This blood connection and genealogical links to past monarchs gave credence and legitimacy to those who usurped weak kings. This period of English history is unique for the treatment of kings, yet kingship itself survived and was a prize that many thought was worth fighting and even dying for.

Unlike other royal families who acted in an endogamic way, for example the Hapsburgs, the pool of people in the English nobility and royal family was wide enough and took place over a considerable period of 250 years and thus avoided any genetic problems.

Scotland

The monarchy in Scotland from 1300 to 1550 experienced several major problems. In 1290 the heir to the Scottish throne, Margaret, Maid of Norway (1283–90) died on her way to claim the throne. The succession was therefore in doubt with many different claimants. Edward I of England was asked to decide the correct candidate as he was considered feudal overlord of Scotland by some. The king used monastic chronicles, legal documents and other evidence from Scotland and England to reach his decision, in 1291, and a meeting was held in the same year to announce his decision although the bishop of Glasgow argued that Edward had no feudal jurisdiction over Scotland. This point has been lost in many documents; and in any case it did not prevent Edward from appointing John Balliol (c.1240–c.1314/15) as king. While most historians agree that this was the correct decision, the question of whether or not Edward had the right to make it has been the subject of much discussion. This situation may have remained stable, but subsequently Edward tried to enforce his ‘rights’ as overlord on John, who abdicated in 1296. This led to an interregnum until 1306 when Robert the Bruce (1274–1329) seized the throne, and led to many unsettled years of warfare and border raiding between England and Scotland. It also signalled the start of the ‘Auld Alliance’ of Scotland with France that lasted over the next few centuries against England.

But the accession of Robert did not settle the succession disputes. His son and successor, David II (1324–71), had no heirs, and he struggled to keep the throne; he was deposed by his nephew Edward (?-1365), of the Balliol family, in 1333. Edward was deposed himself in 1336 by David, and later died in England. David II was then succeeded by the first of the Stewart monarchs, Robert II (1316–90). This king provided some stability, but the problems encountered here and in the succeeding century were

serious, as James I (1394–1437) was held captive in England from 1406 to 1424, and was followed by a series of young kings who required minority councils. These events undermined the authority of the kings of Scotland. In addition James I was eventually assassinated in 1437; his son, James II (1430–60), was killed by a cannonball in 1460, and he left a young son of eight, James III (1452–88), who was himself assassinated in 1488. James IV (1473–1513) fared no better; he was killed at the Battle of Flodden fighting against the English, leaving his own baby son, James V (1512–42), who ascended the throne aged only one. When James V died, in 1542, he left a newborn daughter, Mary, Queen of Scots (1542–87).

This series of problems for the Scottish kings did not put the throne in danger from outside forces, but it did weaken the institution of monarchy in this realm. The series of minority rulers put power into the hands of the nobility, who were reluctant to stand back when kings came of age, and also exposed the rivalries of the different noble houses in Scotland. Mary's son, James VI (1566–1625) became king of England as well as Scotland on the death of Elizabeth I (1533–1603) of England in 1603, uniting these two crowns.

France

In 1300 the royal house of Capet was ending, with a series of short-lived kings, the sons and one grandson of Philip IV (d. 1285). None of these kings – Louis X (1289–1316), John I, infant son of Louis X (for five days in 1316); Philip V (1293–1322) or Charles IV (1294–1328), reigned for any length of time, and on the death of Charles IV there was no direct heir. This situation continued the discussions that had started at the accession of Philip V about the validity of claims to the French throne by women and by men descended from female lines. The Estates General (parliament) were opposed to this and started the process of validating this view through study of ancient laws. This came to a head at the accession of Philip VI (1293–1350) in 1328. At this date the ancient claims known as Salic Law were used to pass the right to the throne through only male lines. In 1328 this created the seeds of the dispute, later known as the Hundred Years' War (1337–1453) between England and France, as Edward III of England (r. 1327–77) was a closer claimant to the French throne than Philip VI (r. 1328–50), but through the right of Edward's mother, Isabella of France. Edward's claim to the French throne, along with other factors, led to the start of this conflict that in many ways shaped the later Middle Ages. How seriously Edward viewed his claim to the French throne is a subject of

much historical debate, but the kings and queens of England claimed this title until 1801.

The French throne continued to be passed from father to son until the beginning of the fifteenth century, when the defeat of the French at the Battle of Agincourt, in 1415, forced the French king, Charles VI (1368–1422) to renounce the claims of his son, Charles (later Charles VII r. 1422–61), in favour of the heirs of Henry V of England (r. 1413–22). This led to the Dual Monarchy of both England and France by Henry VI of England after 1422, ending in 1453 with the final defeat of England in the Hundred Years' War.

By 1300 the French kings had already limited the power of the English kings in France, as Dukes of Aquitaine, Anjou and Maine, an area known as the Angevin Empire. This area of France had been inherited by the kings of England through Eleanor of Aquitaine (1122–1204), wife of Henry II of England (1151–89) and mother of King Richard I (1157–99) and King John (1166–1216). French kings extended their power and influence over larger areas of France in our period, with these earlier powerful duchies coming under the control of the French kings. This process was completed at the end of the fifteenth century with the marriage of Anne of Brittany, duchess of Brittany, to Louis XII of France (1462–1515).

By 1550 the nature of French kingship had changed significantly from what it had been in 1300. The French monarchy now controlled all areas of France, unlike the earlier period when this authority only extended over the Ile de France area around Paris, when they had accepted the fealty of the many important duchies within France, but in reality they had little influence in these areas. But by 1550 this was very different as they had extended their influence and control over all their subjects, especially nobles, and the monarchy had moved towards an absolute style of reigning. This movement towards absolute monarchy, seen as a consequence of the Hundred Years' War (1337–1453), had serious repercussions in the following centuries.

Germany

Monarchy in Germany was different from that in other European countries. There were kings of Germany and this title was in addition to and often mixed with the role of Holy Roman Emperor. In many works these titles appear interchangeable or the kingship element is missed altogether. Medieval Germany was split into smaller states, some kingdoms, some principalities, others counties. Over all of these was the role of the Holy

Roman Emperor, an elected post, to whom all the leaders of these smaller states offered their fealty (loyalty). The lands and income of the kings of Germany from their estates had diminished by 1300, and the role of king of Germany came to be eclipsed by the income and prestige of the title of Emperor.

The title Holy Roman Emperor had its antecedents in the empire created by Charlemagne (c.747–814) across Europe. After his death this broke down into Frankish areas in the west and Saxon ones in the east. Although Charlemagne did not use this title, preferring ‘august emperor’, rulers in the east adopted it after 1157. The link to the ancient Roman Empire in the eastern areas is slightly ironic, as many of these were never part of the original ancient Roman Empire. By 1300 the links to the Frankish west were lost and the crowning of the emperor by the popes was a historical tradition.

As emperors, these men were crowned by popes, originally in Rome, but by the fourteenth century this took place in Aachen. A crowned emperor also had authority over the kings of Burgundy (after 1032), Bohemia and Italy, but this was subject to change over our period as the emperors were often in opposition to the popes and their territories, and there were many conflicts in Italy between the emperors and the different city-states.

Some of the smaller administrative units of Germany were led by prince-bishops (or prince-archbishops) and these areas corresponded with their diocese, for example, Mainz, Cologne and Trier. The titles of the other rulers – dukes, kings or princes – were dependant on historical custom.

The leaders of these smaller units were responsible for the election of the German king/emperor, a decision not always based on the concept of primogeniture. For example, Richard of Cornwall, brother of Henry III of England (1209–72) was elected as emperor in 1257 (after a significant amount of bribery), at the same time as Alfonso X of Castile (1221–84) was elected by a rival faction. The number of prince-electors was set at seven in the fourteenth century, comprising the Archbishops of Mainz, Cologne and Trier, the King of Bohemia, the Duke of Saxony, the Margrave of Brandenburg and Count Palatine of the Rhine. The Archbishop of Mainz voted last, and therefore had the casting vote. This group then called themselves ‘prince-electors’, a prestigious title among the other German principalities.

The early fourteenth century saw many conflicts over the role of the king of Germany, with the popes attempting to limit their power in Italy as well as succession disputes. The relative weakness of the king led to the development of the powers of the princely territories, rather than the

monarch, a factor dealt with by Charles IV (1316–78). He inherited the Bohemian throne after the death of his father, John, at the Battle of Crecy (1346), and was elected Emperor in 1349. He worked with the German Diet (or assembly) to pass the Golden Bull of 1356, to avoid the disputes of the past. The Bull determined that the borders of the principalities were set; primogeniture was the process of inheritance in these areas; the Archbishop of Mainz had the casting vote in imperial elections; and these elections were to be located in Frankfurt and the coronation in Aachen. This Bull was enacted across the remainder of our period.

Despite the elected nature of the emperorship, Charles engineered the election of his son as successor two years before his death, and the relative weakness of the popes during the Great Schism (1378–1417) meant that papal confirmation of this role was largely abandoned. While the Emperors' role grew with the extensive lands and revenues of their different areas, the relative prosperity of the kingdom and king of Germany declined. The financial problems of the emperor/king in the fourteenth century were made worse by the large sums spent on bribes to achieve this role.

The emperors also extended their territory beyond Germany, and this meant that many candidates for the role were not native Germans. Emperor Sigismund (1368–1437), who was king of Germany from 1411 and Holy Roman Emperor from 1433 to 1437, was also king of Hungary, through the right of his wife, Mary (1371–95). He was accused of focusing his attention on the non-German territories under his control, Hungary and Bohemia. In an age when many kings held multiple titles, this was not an uncommon issue for many areas in the east of Europe.

It was Sigismund's successor, his son in law Albert II (1397–1439), who remedied many of these issues and improved the administration of Germany. The elected accession of his cousin, Frederick III (1415–93) in 1440 as King of Germany saw the Hapsburgs tighten their control of the German throne; Frederick was subsequently elected emperor, in 1452. The issues in Germany over the authority of the princes, cities or emperor were a perennial problem, and Frederick had to deal with these carefully to avoid being replaced as emperor. During his reign the threat in the east from the Ottoman Turks was strong, and there were real fears that Germany would suffer the same fate as Constantinople (1453) and Serbia (1459), both of which had fallen to these forces. In 1486, Frederick was forced to resign as king in favour of his son Maximilian I (1459–1519), but he retained the title of emperor.

In the same way as in England and Scotland, the fifteenth century was a

troublesome period for German kings. The authority of the king was challenged by his subjects, and the demand for more representation grew. This will be dealt with in detail in [Chapter 7](#); but here we can say that it was a testing time for the monarchy. The German kings had many areas of dissent, as their role as emperor meant they had to deal with different areas of Germany as well as other dominions, for example, Austria, Luxembourg, the threat from the Turks to the east and problems with the papacy.

The fortunes of the Hapsburg House changed significantly with the accession of Charles V (1500–58) in 1519. Charles inherited several titles and areas of Europe: he was the Holy Roman Emperor and king of Germany as heir of Maximilian I (1459–1519), and King of Aragon and Castile as heir of Ferdinand (1459–1516) and Isabella (1451–1504); in addition, he was Archduke of Austria and inherited the Burgundian Netherlands. He became the first king of a united Spain, and this powerful Hapsburg dynasty changed the balance of power across Europe in the sixteenth century.

Charles' reaction to the Reformation and the teachings of Martin Luther was a powerful factor in the religious upheaval of the time. The marriage of his aunt, Catherine of Aragon, to Henry VIII of England – and more particularly, Henry's desire to end that marriage – led to the breaking away of the English Church from Roman authority, and had profound implications for the rise of Protestantism. In addition, Charles' defeat of the Ottoman Turks at the gates of Vienna in 1529 was a highly significant moment in European history.

Charles' son, Philip II (1527–98) inherited the Spanish empire in 1558, while the German monarchy was inherited by his younger brother Ferdinand I (1503–64), splitting this vast empire along national lines.

Spain – Castile

Castile as a kingdom was created from the union of Castile and the older realm of Leon in the eleventh century, and the two thrones were united in 1230 under Ferdinand III (c.1201–52). In the fourteenth century, an attempt by Castile to annex Portugal failed, even though Castile was the largest realm on the Iberian Peninsula at this date.

The throne of Castile was not an elected monarchy but one based on primogeniture; it did not debar women from the throne, though their claims were second to those of any male heirs. In the same ways as other monarchies, this system led to problems when monarchs were children or mentally unable to rule. Of the eleven monarchs in the period 1296–1558,

six were children when they ascended the throne: Ferdinand IV (1285–1312) in 1296; Alfonso XI (1311–50) in 1312; Peter I (1334–69) in 1350; Henry III (1379–1406) in 1390; John II (1405–54) in 1406 and finally Charles I of Castile (Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor) (1500–58) as joint monarch with his mother Joanna I (1479–1555) in 1516. In this period one king, Peter I (1334–69) was usurped and killed by his rival, Henry II (1334–79), who was also his illegitimate half-brother. While this period saw the perceived successes of the Reconquista, with the gradual expulsion of the Moors from the Iberian Peninsula, many monarchs also suffered from civil wars, conflicts with neighbours – including Portugal and Aragon – and revolts by their nobles. For many commentators the ascension of Isabella I, in 1474, coincided with the end of a series of weak medieval monarchs. The effectiveness of the Castilian monarchy depended on the personal qualities of each monarch and their ability to rule successfully in spite of outside events, such as the Black Death, famine and internal problems caused by the failure to provide an adult monarch.

During this period, intermarriages between Castile and the other European royalty indicated their connections to the rest of Europe. While many marriages took place within the Peninsula itself, these sometimes caused some bitter fighting over claims to different thrones, and many looked beyond the Pyrenees to create new networks and alliances. This can be seen in the accession of Joanna, daughter of Ferdinand and Isabella, to both Castile and Aragon. Her marriage to Philip, Duke of Burgundy (1478–1506), led to the Hapsburg influence in Spain, a feature that dominated Europe for the next century, despite the Holy Roman Empire and the Spanish sections being split by their son, Charles V (see Germany above).

Spain – Aragon

The monarchy of Aragon in our period was also based on primogeniture rather than election. Unlike Castile, it did not have a series of minor kings, as all monarchs ascended to the throne as adult males. The rights of females were subservient to males, and in the case of Martin (1356–1410) the rights of the daughters of his predecessor, John I (1350–96) were overlooked in favour of their uncle.

The Crown of Aragon in this period passed between brothers more often than in other kingdoms, and when Martin died, in 1410, there was a two-year interregnum when the claims of five contenders were assessed to see who was eligible for the throne. This was achieved peacefully, upholding the claim of Ferdinand I (1380–1416), the younger son of John I of Castile

and his queen Eleanor of Aragon, (1358–82), daughter of Peter IV of Aragon (1319–87). While there were internal conflicts within the royal family, this did not lead to any usurpation, but Charles, the eldest son of John II (1398–1479) was rumoured to have been poisoned by his stepmother.

The Crown of Aragon was joined with those of Navarre and Naples by Ferdinand II (1452–1516) in 1504 and 1512 respectively. This Ferdinand was the husband of Isabella of Castile, and their heir, Joanna, represented the later joining of the Crowns of Aragon and Castile after Ferdinand's death in 1516, although she was co-monarch with her son, Charles V (See above).

Spain/France – Navarre

The small kingdom of Navarre, located between France and northern Spain, had been an independent kingdom until the marriage of Joan I (1273–1308) to Philip III of France (1245–85) in 1284. The two kingdoms were linked until the death of Charles IV of France in 1328. In the succession crisis of this period, the kingdom of Navarre was split from France, as the heir to the French throne was a woman, Joan II (1312–49). The French Estates General and the future Philip IV of France barred Joan from the French throne, justifying it under ancient Salic Law, but Navarre had no such restrictions. Therefore, Joan ascended to the throne of Navarre in 1328, with her husband Philip III of Navarre, Count of Evreux (1306–43). Navarre remained a separate kingdom until the sixteenth century. In 1512 Ferdinand of Aragon captured the southern part of the kingdom and amalgamated it with the Spanish Crown. Under Henry II (1503–55) and his daughter Joan (1528–72) the remainder of the kingdom became part of the French throne, after the accession of Joan's son, Henry VI of France in 1589.

The Crown of Navarre operated the process of primogeniture; it did not bar female accession and was also not an elected monarchy. In common with other dynasties of the period, it suffered from external conflicts with France, Aragon and England, as well as internal dynastic struggles. After the death of Blanche I (1387–1441), her husband King John of Aragon denied his daughter, Blanche, her birthright, after her brother Charles died, in 1402, possibly by poison at the hands of their stepmother, Joanna (see above). Blanche was imprisoned by her father, John II of Aragon (r. 1425–79), and her remaining sister, Eleanor, who had supported him. Eleanor eventually gained the throne after her father's death, but she survived for

only two further weeks. This left her ten-year-old grandson, Francis (r. 1479–83) as king. This minority, and that of his sister, Catherine (1468–1517), left the kingdom vulnerable to the expansionist plans of Castile and Aragon. By the time, Catherine's son Henry II (r. 1517–55) came to the throne, in 1517, the kingdom was much reduced in size.

The Crown of Navarre demonstrated all the patterns seen above, that is, external relations and alliances contracted by marriages, warfare against different kingdoms and the vulnerability of a kingdom when the monarch was a minor. Navarre also demonstrated the sometimes ruthless nature of royal families when it came to inheritance.

Portugal

The throne of Portugal was well established by 1300, after the realm of Portugal had been established as an independent kingdom in 1139. Denis I (1261–1325) has been credited with a growth in the sense of national identity in his reign that also saw an increase in royal powers.

The Portuguese Crown had some succession problems, especially in 1383–85 when Ferdinand I (1345–83) left only a single heir, his daughter, who was married to John I of Castile. In this case, Ferdinand's illegitimate half brother, John (1358–1433) claimed the throne. His accession in 1385, after a two-year interregnum, was popular in Portugal, as it prevented the country from being absorbed by the kingdom of Castile. This is a recurring theme in the monarchy of Portugal, as so many marriages over our period occurred between the kingdoms of Aragon, Castile and Portugal, concentrating in the Iberian Peninsula. When a king died without a strong male heir, this often led to conflicts over the succession claims to thrones through the rights of marriage (often through daughters) and warfare.

The level of intermarriage has also been credited with problems over the lack of healthy children. John III (1502–57) married his first cousin Eleanor of Austria (granddaughter of Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castile). This marriage produced nine children, of which only two, Maria and John lived beyond six years. Both married and produced children, but Maria's son was called 'deformed', and eventually was imprisoned by his father for physiological problems. John's son Sebastian (1554–78) came to the Portuguese throne at the age of three and disappeared in battle in 1578. Of the other seven children, three died at birth, two at the age of six and the other two before they were aged two years. This inbreeding also caused problems in the Hapsburg descendants in the united throne of Spain.

The Portuguese Crown used primogeniture as a means of succession.

There were no female monarchs in their own right, and when there were succession issues female rights were considered, but in deference to those of males. Over time and especially at the end of the fifteenth and into the sixteenth centuries, the kings of Portugal began to rule in an absolutist manner, with both John III and his father Manuel I (1469–1521) strengthening the powers of the monarch. At the same time the Portuguese throne encouraged and benefitted from the expansion of their power into the Portuguese Empire in Africa and South America, especially Brazil. These monarchs also benefitted from the increase of trade in the Far East, especially Japan, India and China.

Norway/Sweden/Denmark

The Crowns of these three countries were closely entwined in our period. In 1300 they were separate, but in 1319 Haakon V of Norway (1270–1319) died, leaving a young grandson on the throne, Magnus (1316–74: r. Norway, 1319–43; r. Sweden, 1319–64). Due to intermarriage, he was crowned King of Norway and Sweden in 1336, when he reached the majority age of 20. His son Haakon VI (1340–80) was created king of Norway in 1343, due to resistance over the amalgamation of the two Crowns (his elder brother Eric was elected king of Sweden in a disputed title but died before his father in 1359). When Haakon VI married Margaret of Denmark (1353–1412) in 1363, their three Crowns were joined, creating the Kalmar Union, which lasted until 1523. While these three Crowns were under one person, their countries were never amalgamated; the three remained independent of each other, with their own laws and nobility. Norway's throne had traditionally been passed on by primogeniture, but within the Kalmar Union it gradually became an elective monarchy, in common with Denmark and Sweden.

The monarchs were meant to be crowned in each country, but this did not always occur. Within the Union, the Danish Crown was the dominant partner, and these kings were also Dukes of Schleswig and Holstein, meaning that relations with Germany were a factor. The Kalmar Union split in 1523, when King Christian II (1481–1559) was deposed in Sweden by Gustav (1496–1560), who was not a royal relative but a leader of the opposition to the king. This signalled the end of an elective monarchy in Sweden, and all subsequent monarchs ascended the throne through hereditary right – primogeniture – not election. The Crowns of Denmark and Norway remained linked in a smaller Kalmar Union to the end of our period and beyond. Norway was the minor partner, and indeed some kings,

such as Frederick I (1471–1533) never visited the country, and was therefore never crowned in Norway.

The reign of Margaret of Denmark (1353–1412), as queen of all three nations set a precedence for female rulers, a situation that had never occurred in Denmark before. The crowns of all three nations suffered from succession issues, with kings failing to produce heirs, and also faced rebellions by nobles and peasants. These issues did lead to conflicts and war, but the monarchy itself survived.

Poland/Hungary

The crowns of Poland and Hungary united and disunited at various times over the course of our period. These monarchies were elective, though they favoured eldest sons. In this period the monarchs spent much time dealing with the Teutonic Knights (See [Chapter 9](#) – Chivalry) and also the Ottoman Turks. By the sixteenth century, relations with the Turks had settled and the Knights had been defeated.

The Polish and Hungarian Crowns suffered from a lack of heirs, especially male ones. Louis I (1326–82) had only daughters, and during his reign he attempted to make his nobles accept them as monarchs after his death. This was agreed, but both his daughters were crowned as kings (*Rex*) not queens (*Regina*). Louis was king of both Poland and Hungary, but the two countries split under the rule of his two daughters Mary, Queen of Hungary (1371–95) and Hedwig, Queen of Poland (1374–99). Both women married, and Mary's husband, Sigismund (1368–1437), continued to rule after his wife's death, due to the lack of a clear heir. Sigismund held many other titles during his lifetime, including Prince Elector of Brandenburg, King of Bohemia, King of Italy and Holy Roman Emperor, indicating the complicated dynastic issues of this period. The Polish nobles had indicated their support for autonomy after the death of Louis I in 1382, and hence the crowns were split.

Likewise Hedwig, who married Vladislav II Jagiello, was crowned as a king of Poland not a queen. Her husband also ruled after her death and his heirs by his second marriage inherited the throne.

The problem of heirs continued for both crowns into the sixteenth century, with kings unable to produce heirs or dying while these were young especially when the heirs were grandchildren. Over time the Polish kings had problems with their nobles, and also with parliament (Diet). Alexander I (1461–1506) lost many financial powers to the *Sejm* (lower house of the Polish parliament) during his reign. While the kings had many

clashes with the Polish Diet there were developments in the legal code. One consequence of these changes was that serfdom in Poland was reinforced, meaning serfs were tied more closely to the estates of the nobility.

Polish and Hungarian kings were successful in establishing Roman Catholicism in their realms, halting the western expansion of the Ottoman Empire. At the same time, different areas were absorbed into their kingdoms, and the rights of the Crown, nobles and parliament were defined. But they were both seriously weakened by a lack of heirs, which meant that even an 'elective' monarchy, sometimes had trouble finding suitable candidates for the throne.

Italy

The Italian peninsula was not united in our period, and it comprised a variety of different types of states. These ranged from the city-states of Genoa and Venice, powerful trading hubs whose territories extended well beyond their city boundaries, to duchies, for example, Amalfi, and kingdoms, notably Sicily and Naples. In terms of monarchies, those areas ruled by kings gradually became smaller states absorbed by other powers.

After the revolt in 1282, called the Sicilian Vespers, Charles of Anjou, King of Naples (1227–85) lost control of the Kingdom of Sicily. In 1302 the kingdom was split into the island of Sicily and the mainland section, which was called the Kingdom of Naples. Sicily remained an independent kingdom, though it was under constant threat from the mainland kingdom of Naples and destabilised by a series of minor monarchs in the thirteenth century. The succession was in crisis again after the death of Maria, Queen of Sicily (1363–1401), whose only son predeceased her and whose husband Martin continued to rule after her death in 1401. In 1396 Martin ascended to the Aragonese throne as well. Their successor was Ferdinand I of Aragon (1380–1416), Martin's nephew. The two kingdoms were then united from this period.

The Kingdom of Naples on the Italian mainland was held by Charles II of Naples (1254–1309) after 1302, along with his other territories, which included the kingdom of Albania and the duchies of Anjou and Provence. Charles made a pact with the kingdom of Castile to try to regain Sicily, but this was not successful, and the island of Sicily remained out of their hegemony. Henceforth this mainland kingdom became the Kingdom of Naples.

Both Naples and Sicily recognised female monarchs, and these women held their thrones in their own right. Joanna I of Naples (1328–82) was

named by her father, Robert of Naples (1277–1343) as his heir, with her sister Maria to succeed should Joanna die without heirs. The pope crowned Joanna as queen in 1344, and although her first husband, Andrew of Hungary, was crowned king, he was excluded from any power within the kingdom; he was eventually murdered in 1345. Her fourth and last husband, Otto, Duke of Brunswick-Grubenhagen, was only given the title of prince consort not king, leaving regal power within the queen's hands.

The mainland Kingdom of Naples was beset by a series of problems with disputed successions, dynastic conflicts and kings dying with no heirs. These gave rise to conflicts that weakened the throne and the realm itself. The fifteenth century saw the kingdom becoming part of the Kingdom of Aragon, with Alfonso V of Aragon (1396–1458) claiming the title in 1442, after the death of Joanna II (1373–1435). Naples became part of the united Spanish throne under Joanna III (1479–1555), daughter of Ferdinand and Isabella.

The kings and queens of Sicily and Naples ascended the throne by virtue of primogeniture and after their inclusion in the Spanish dynasties followed their traditions and customs.

Northern Italy was considered part of the Holy Roman Empire, and the centre of Italy comprised the Papal States ruled by popes and the city republics of Genoa and Naples.

Summary

Monarchy across Western Europe can be a fascinating area of study for its variety, changes and importance. What can be seen in this small introduction is the variety of kingship and queenship across our period and their geographical significance.

Within Western Europe there were some countries with strong centralised systems, whose kings (or queens) did exercise genuine power, while others in less centralised realms were subject to election to the throne by their peers. This demonstrates clearly that medieval monarchy was not standard, and these differences in the meaning and extent of the title of 'king', need to be considered and understood. The common factor across these realms was the personal nature of kingship.

Across the 250 years of our study the nature of kingship also changed. In France and Portugal, for example, there were moves towards a more absolute monarchy that had ramifications in later years. In other countries, such as England, a limited monarchy already worked with its parliament to a degree, for example, being unable to raise taxes without their consent.

The elective monarchies also changed, with hereditary monarchs being established in Sweden, whereas in Poland the kings faced increasing hostility from their *Sejm* (Parliament) and their nobility.

Kings did rule and reign in this period, but the extent of their power was dependant on their country and often their personality. Kings were not inviolate; they were not always secure on their thrones, and had to act in the accepted manner to keep them. Although usurpation of a king was still very difficult, it did happen and all countries in Europe experienced this turmoil at different times. Kings did not always know their heirs and often had problems with their eldest sons. Medieval monarchy was very personal and the concentration of historical research and writing over the centuries was, and still is, because kings and queens mattered in this period. For all their problems they ruled their kingdoms and their rule reflected their own interests, strengths and weaknesses.

Further reading

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4

Nobility

The nobility of Europe in the period 1300 to 1550 can be defined in basic terms as a social group at the highest level of society below kings (or ruling princes). Although there were some national variations, nobles were people who held land and had distinct privileges normally granted by a king. But while holding land was a distinct feature of this group, not everyone who held land was noble, as they made up a relatively small number of families in every country. They closely guarded their status, and admission to this status was difficult, if not impossible, except by birth. The nobles were just one layer of a deeply stratified society. While historians discuss nobility, its features and functions, the term was in fact not a contemporary one; it has been retrospectively applied.

The nobility were major landholders, with many privileges and titles, and they were expected to provide advice and counsel for a king when summoned. This summoning of nobles in various formats provided the genesis for parliaments that developed in this period. These early counsel sessions were made up exclusively of nobles; they later grew to include representatives from the Church and notable persons of positions from smaller administrative units (for example, counties in England). In return for providing this counsel, nobles also held positions from the king; some were merely symbolic but they often led to a close relationship with the monarch. Those people we now describe as ‘nobles’ were able to trace their descent from earlier periods, often to earlier family members who had provided military service, along with ‘counsel’ (wise or otherwise), for their monarch. This was seen as a ‘right’ even before it developed into the more formalised system of parliaments. In Poland the strength of the

nobility, organised as the Parliament (called the *Sejm*), was such that by 1505 they were able to take power from the king, in a period called the 'Golden Liberty'.

A common factor of all older noble families was the need to provide their king (or emperor) with military service, a major feature of the period. It was the nobility that provided kings with their leaders in battles and military campaigns. These roles had a serious effect, as many were lost or imprisoned during their military duties; this was especially true of France and England during their Hundred Years' War (1337–1453). Many French nobles were lost at the battles of Crecy (1346), Poitiers (1356) and especially Agincourt (1415), to the detriment of the nation. Nobles in other areas of Europe also suffered casualties, in the battles of the Reconquista in the Iberian Peninsula, and in battles against the Ottomans in the east of Europe. This could lead to the failure of a noble line or to underage heirs.

Generally, nobles were part of a society that was feudal in nature, except in some Scandinavian countries, for example Norway, where feudalism did not work, and on the Iberian Peninsula, where it was never introduced. In feudal areas this was the basis of the military support of nobles to their kings as it was a basic expectation in return for land. The feudal tenure or holding of land was vital to nobles, but by 1300 the military service aspect had decreased. Thus feudalism in its purest form was mainly over by 1300, and the situation from this date is termed 'bastard feudalism', where money could replace this military service. While this system of land holding was declining in the west, especially after the ravages of the Black Death (1347–50), it should be noted that the new lands colonised by German settlers in the Baltic areas imposed a feudal system on both their new settlers and original inhabitants.

The nobility was not standard across Europe, although there were many similarities. The fate of the nobility varied across Europe with those in England acting endogomously, for example, while in France nobility became more varied. In Norway, however, the nobility became almost obsolete after the Black Death and the resulting population contraction.

The stratification of the nobility also varied, with knights being considered as the lowest in this class in France and Germany, while in England these were considered only as gentry (a lower non-noble level of society). While there were distinctions between different ranks of nobility, earls and dukes for example, there were also distinctions within each of these classes. These differentiations often included precedence by age of the honour, the importance of any honours conferred by a king or, in England for example, by whether or not they had the right to be called to

Parliament. In England this particular division meant that those who attended Parliament were (and still are) called peers. Some distinctions could be related to the relative value of their holdings, and all could cause precedence disputes, some of which were vitriolic and could be judged in a Court of Chivalry (See [Chapter 9](#)).

As a social group, the nobility of late medieval Europe was incredibly resilient and survived by marriage alliances with those at the same social level. These marriages not only enabled the creation of children through whom the land and titles could pass to a new generation, but also strengthened the social ties among the noble families.

Many post-World-War-II historians have expressed a view that these families underwent a crisis in our period, but more recent research has tempered this view. While the ravages of the Black Death and subsequent visitations of plagues affected the noble families, and some did die out due to lack of heirs, this was not a wholesale contraction. These later historians have also reconsidered the relationship between the nobility and the emerging merchant classes in urban centres. These have often been seen as distinct groups, representing the higher echelons of society in their relative areas, merchants in urban centres and the nobility as mainly rural landlords. But this is too rigid a division, and much recent research has indicated that many of the nobility generated their income from commerce as well as from their rural lands. However, it must be said that while there was interaction between these two groups, few marriages occurred across this boundary, mostly involving impoverished noble families who might marry a son to a merchant heiress. This rural/urban division was less apparent in Italy and in parts of the Iberian Peninsula.

Sumptuary laws

The stratification of society can also be seen in the sumptuary laws passed in our period, which tried to prescribe what different ranks of people could wear and even eat. The type of material used for clothes and the different furs allowed for each rank were also closely defined, although scholars question their effectiveness. The prescription of food by rank was attempted by Philip IV of France (1268–1314) and also Edward II of England (1284–1327), while his son Edward III (1312–77) tried to restrict types of clothing by rank in 1336.

Sumptuary laws that graded clothing by rank were also attempted in other countries in the sixteenth century, including Italy. While they were rarely successful, as historical documents they can reveal the relative

importance of each rank in society. An interesting point about these laws is that they were generally aimed at men, not women. When women's clothing was included it was to make sure that women of society were easily differentiated from prostitutes by dress.

Rulers attempted the same kind of regulations and codifications with liveries as they did with dress. A livery was the clothing provided by a lord (or king) for servants and followers, often displaying personal devices and colours for identification. In many ways these were an extension of the coats of arms carried by nobles and knights. These liveries not only differentiated followers of a noble in public, they were also stratified within a noble household as well as a way of denoting status, with the method of their manufacture, from cloth to gold or silver denoting relative status. Many nobles had private armies in this period, and these livery badges were used for identification in both peace and on the battlefield.

Public life

While many churchmen held important roles within the organisation of a kingdom, often as clerks in royal service, the nobility also played an important part in public life across Europe. Their roles could be merely symbolic or important diplomatic missions.

The symbolic roles could provide intimate access to a ruler in ways that might seem strange today, for example a groom of the stool provided an intimate service to a monarch and it was this intimacy that made these roles important. These jobs were hotly contested or could travel through families by right.

In the same way that many of the nobility headed the armies of a ruler, they also performed this function on diplomatic missions. Much of this was related to status: the more important the person sent on a diplomatic mission the better this would be received in another court. These missions could be sent to both lay and clerical courts. Service to the Crown in either capacity was a method of improving not only personal finances but also prestige.

Blood royal

The relationship between the nobility and kings was not simple in our period, as many younger sons, cousins and uncles of kings were members of the nobility while also being members of the Blood Royal, or 'prince du sang' in France. The closeness to the throne had an impact on prestige and

some traditional titles, but equally there could be many members of the nobility with a blood connection to a king that was distant. In these cases the connection provided prestige, rather than a claim to the throne. The importance of the Blood Royal in our period cannot be ignored in terms of inheritance of titles as well as the throne itself. The usurpations of this period came from those in the nobility who had close connections to the throne by blood. In England, Richard II (r. 1377–99) was usurped by his cousin, Henry Bolingbroke, later Henry IV, (r. 1399–1413). They were both grandsons of Edward IV but from two branches, Richard the more senior line and Henry from the second senior male line, the dukes of Lancaster.

In this era, the keeping of family records was important and these often included genealogical tables. This was not only part of the prestige of a nobleman but also a practical exercise. In this period many family lines failed through the death of heirs or lack of children reaching adulthood, while others had ‘entails’ which could restrict women from inheriting. In these cases genealogical tables could help identify relatively distant family connections and therefore the correct heirs to titles and land. Likewise, distant cousins could keep these records in order to claim their inheritance, and many cases came to court in order to establish a legal heir. These genealogies were often quite speculative and could trace antecedents back to Moses, earlier kings and mythical people. However they are beautiful surviving documents, and they do have a practical application.

The importance and usefulness of having the Blood Royal was in some eras a two-edged sword. A member of the nobility with a blood connection to a ruler could mean a close relationship, prestige and power for an individual. But being too close to a throne in an unsettled period could also mean imprisonment or even death. The case of Edward, Duke of Warwick (1475–99) is one example of how the Blood Royal was in fact a death sentence. Edward was the son of George, Duke of Clarence (1449–78) brother of both Edward IV (1442–83) and Richard III (1452–85) of England. After the Battle of Bosworth in 1485, Richard’s cousin Henry Tudor (Henry VII, 1457–1509) won the throne, although Edward had a greater claim. This young man lived virtually all his life imprisoned in either royal households or the Tower of London. He was eventually executed at the age of sixteen after he was implicated in plots against the king. His sister, Margaret Pole, Countess of Salisbury, was also executed, but by Henry VIII (1491–1547) in 1541, at the age of 68.

The importance of the Blood Royal varied across Europe. In England the nobility and extended royal family were very similar, as the family acted in an endogamous way in our period, marrying within this wide clan with few

foreign marriages even for kings. Thus, the English nobility could all trace their antecedents to some royal ancestor, and the relative importance of Blood Royal in these cases was related to whoever held the throne at any one time. In France, however, the nobility were gradually being absorbed into the royal family, for example, the dukes of Brittany in 1492. The nobility of France was more varied in its composition, with use of many courtesy titles, the ennoblement of many who served the Crown and some being created by Letters Patent from the king.

Ranks and titles

Most ranks and titles were based on roles and titles from the ancient Roman Empire.

Duke

From the Latin *dux/ducis*, meaning military companion. This is the senior title below the rank of king or prince. Some dukes in the late medieval period acted as ‘mini kings’ in their duchies; the Dukes of Burgundy are a good example.

All English and Spanish dukes were peers, that is, they held the right to be called to the nation’s parliament, to provide counsel for the king. In France dukes could also be archbishops or bishops. In Germany the equivalent title was ‘Herzog’. Dukes were created in Portugal only from 1415.

Marquess/Marquis

The name of this rank originates with the link of the title to the land under control: a ‘March’. Hence, the Latin origin of this title is *marca* – frontier. Traditionally the land of a March was a border area, on the fringes of a country, and therefore more significant in military terms than a county headed by a count or earl. This meant a marquess was more important, hence their place in the ranking below a duke (often royal) but above a count/earl.

In Germany these were called ‘margraves’ and were closely linked to a distinct geographical area.

Count/Earls

Count comes from Latin *comes* meaning companion. In England the

equivalent rank was earl, whose wife was called a countess. Counts/Earls were not created in medieval Poland during the Polish/Lithuanian period (See [Chapter 3](#)).

This rank was known in Germany as a ‘Graf’, in Scandinavia as ‘Greve’ and in France as ‘Comte’.

Viscount

Viscount comes from the Latin *vice comites* – deputy count or companion. Introduced into England in 1440, this rank was not found in Portugal or Germany.

Baron

Baron may come from the Latin *baro* – meaning warrior or man; it is often considered the lowest order of nobility.

Many countries also included knights as nobles. While all barons were knights, having inherited the status and accepted knighthood, in England not all knights were nobles (See [Chapter 9](#) Chivalry).

Illegitimate children

During our period many men of the nobility fathered illegitimate children, and this is often linked to the fact that marriages at this level of society were generally arranged, dynastic unions, not love matches. It must also be considered that this behaviour on the part of men was not always considered scandalous. What is not discussed, either in contemporary documents or today, is whether women of the nobility had children not fathered by their husbands. While this can probably never be established, it is a factor that needs some consideration.

There is also a perception that many noble families of this period abounded with illegitimate children. Some sources from late fifteenth/early sixteenth century Italy give this impression, but whether this reflected a European phenomenon or merely a local situation is not clear. The Italian chronicle sources are not matched by others from different periods or other countries and therefore may have coloured other research.

The status and prospects of illegitimate children varied across Europe by country. The relative rank or status of the mother was a key factor, and the lower her rank generally the lower likelihood of any children rising in class.

Other factors were the length of any parental relationship; whether the child had any personal contact with the father and whether or not the father had legal heirs.

Where a legal marriage did not produce heirs, the fate of illegitimate sons in particular was highly favourable.

In Germany, these children were rarely legitimised, and therefore they could not become heirs of their fathers. It also appears that into the sixteenth century opportunities for these offspring to move into careers in law and the church were being greatly restricted. In contrast, the illegitimate children of nobles in France were able to inherit their father's noble status and could be made their heirs. In England, these children were often acknowledged as bastards, and offered support and careers as churchmen or careers in law, while daughters were often married into the baronage. Only rarely were these children legitimised; an example of illegitimate children who were legitimised were the Beaufort children of John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster (1340–99), son of Edward III (1312–77). The Beauforts were ancestors of Henry VII, king of England, (1457–1509). In Italy and on the Iberian Peninsula these children were often legitimised as heirs.

Nobility across Europe

England

The English system of nobility was much simpler than many in Europe, especially France and Germany. In 1300 the kings were counselled by their earls, a title derived from the earlier Anglo Saxon, 'eorls'. The title of duke was introduced in 1337; it ranked above earl and was originally only for those with royal blood who were close to the throne. In 1397 this was extended by the creation of six new titles for the non-royal dukes by Richard II (1367–1400). This group was disparagingly called the 'duketti' by his opponents.

Richard II also used the title 'marquess' for the first time in England, in 1385, while Henry VI (1421–71) introduced the rank of 'viscount' in 1440. But it must be noted that, while the title of marquess originally meant a lord of a march – a border – the Marcher Lords in England, who held lands on the marches, especially of Wales, were NOT marquesses, but only earls. The Earls of March, who were specifically responsible for many of these lands, were never made a marquess. The introduction by Richard II was unpopular and seen as 'un-English' as the marquis was more popular on the

Continent. In its English context it was the rank that was the significant factor, and not any geographical connection to land.

The English nobility only covered those from princes and dukes to barons; unlike France and Germany, England did not include knights in the nobility.

Members of the nobility who had a right to be summoned to parliament became a sub-group, called the peers, and this was a highly contested honour of the period.

<i>Title: Male</i>	<i>Title: Female</i>	<i>Significance</i>
Duke	Duchess	Created in 1337 all royal, 1397 first non-royal dukedoms created by Richard II
Marquess	Marchioness	Introduced in 1385 by Richard II- the first was Robert de Vere, Marquess of Dublin and Earl of Oxford
Earl	Countess	Counts, title from Anglo-Saxon word – eorls
Viscount	Viscountess	Introduced by Henry VI 1440 – the first was John, Baron Beaumont, Viscount Beaumont
Baron	Baroness	Lowest rank of English nobility

France

The nobility in France was considerably more complicated than that of England. There were ranks of nobility: Princes, dukes, princes (of a principality), marquis (marquess), comte (count); vicomte (viscount) and barons. In addition there were different classes of nobles dependent on how their rank was achieved.

<i>Title</i>	<i>Derivation</i>
Nobility of the Sword	Hereditary – swore an oath of fealty to the king
Nobility of Descent	Could demonstrate 16 quarters in their coat of arms – i.e. back to great, great

Nobility of the Robe	grandparents
Old Nobility	Noble by royal service
Nobility through Letters Patent	Trace noble family from before 1440
	Receive Letters Patent from king
	awarding them a noble title

Many of these were courtesy titles; they were associated with no lands or geographical area and were awarded for service to the French Crown. These titles were all hereditary.

The senior titles were conferred on both laymen and churchmen, for example, the Archbishop of Reims was also the Duke Archbishop of Reims another example is the Duke Bishop of Lâon. These dual titles never died out; they were handed to successive bishops and archbishops, unlike the other titles whose families might not produce heirs or have heirs of the correct age at a coronation of a French king, where they all had specific roles. Traditionally this senior group was limited to twelve men and some of these became absorbed into the French Crown, for example, the duchy of Normandy, which was granted by kings to their sons after 1332.

The French nobility was expanded during our period, and many of these titles were created for princes of the blood up to the sixteenth century. Precedence in this group was determined by the age of a title, not the title itself, so a comte could outrank a duke.

Germany

The nation of Germany was divided into many smaller territories, a number of which were duchies – ruled by dukes or principalities ruled by princes, some of whom were churchmen. These were not equal in either rank or size of their territory.

There were three degrees of nobility – Stände.

<i>Stände</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Members</i>
Reichsfürsten	Princes	Dukes
		Margraves (marquess)
Hochadel	Higher Nobility	Counts
		Barons
Niederadel	Lower Nobility	‘Mere’ noblemen
		Knights

By the end of the fourteenth century the hereditary nature of the Hochadel had been diluted by the granting of these titles by the kings/emperors of Germany in exchange for service or payments. Over time, the gulf between the Hochadel and the Neideradel became much wider, and fewer people moved between these groups.

Sweden

The nobility of Sweden were differentiated from the population not only by title but also by tax exemptions. As in other European countries, the nobility were also granted the honour of attending Parliament – the Diet. The nobility of Sweden also originated in the same way as others in Europe: by providing the king with military support as a mounted knight, but this practice began later in Sweden than in many other countries, being formalised as late as 1280. As time moved on, these mounted knights developed into nobility as they had in other countries, with the right to confer with and counsel the king. Unlike other kingdoms, in Sweden nobles did not hold their land under feudal law but in their own right, as there was no feudal system in place in this country.

Over our period the gap between the high nobility and the lower sections of society widened, and these nobles were further strengthened by the development of the powerful state councils to which they were admitted.

Norway

Norway proved to be the exception to the development of the nobility in this period, as it was severely affected by the Black Death in the middle of the fourteenth century. The subsequent depopulation, falling land values and decreasing wealth affected the nobility to the point that some historians argue that it almost became extinct. There were *c.*600 noble families before this episode, reduced later to *c.*200, and as a consequence many of these families intermarried with Swedish or German nobles.

The ranks of the nobles in Norway, called the ‘hird,’ were not wide, as dukes and earls were not used after the beginning of the fourteenth century. Instead knights (*ridderne*) and squires (*vaepnere*) were the core of the nobility, and they were increasingly powerful, especially in the Council of the Kingdom, until this was abolished in 1536.

Poland (and Lithuania)

The nobility of Poland had distinct privileges that were codified over time.

These included exemption from plough tax, the right to approve levying of taxation, payment when on foreign military expeditions and access to the king. The term ‘clan’ was often used in respect of the noble families where many different branches could share a coat of arms.

The nobility of Poland were very powerful, and over time they limited the role and power of the kings so that kings reigned but did not rule, especially after 1505. They controlled the *Sejm*, or Parliament, which contained nobles of all ranks. The period after 1505 was called the ‘Golden Liberty’, and privileges were granted only to the nobles and not the general population, who were not offered freedom from feudal rules, greater mobility or justice by their lords.

Polish nobility used the common terms for different ranks, such as duke.

<i>Title</i>		<i>Status</i>
Arch Prince	}	Blood Royal
Prince		
Archduke	}	Blood Royal
Duke		
Margrave	}	Marquess
Graf		Count
Baron		

Entry to the nobility or *szlachta* was by birth or adoption into a clan by another powerful lord. In the later period, entry could also be by merit, not always military, such as service to the Crown.

Spain – Aragon and Castile

There was similarity across the nobility in these two countries. The sons and daughters of kings were given the title infante (prince) or infanta (princess) as well as other titles. In common with other countries across Europe, Aragon and Castile used the terms duke, marques (marquess), conde (count/earl), viscount and baron. The nobility were also divided into three ranks of *grandees* – first the high nobility, which could include dukes to viscounts; second, the *caballeros* and third the *hidalgos*. Access to the nobility could be achieved by military or government service or university study, but only to the lower rank of *hidalgo*.

There were further divisions, even within the higher nobility that related to privileges during personal interaction with the king. The highest of these

was the ability to speak to the king with a head covering, next was being allowed to speak to the king with the head uncovered but having to cover the head when the king replied, and third was receiving permission from the king to cover one's head. These might seem strange, trivial and almost immaterial today, but the etiquette in royal courts was very strict and revolved around this sort of small distinction, and privileges such as these were highly sought after.

While there were similarities between Aragon and Castile, differences did develop. Knights (or caballeros) were rare in Castile but common in Aragon, and they were divided into four subgroups:

<i>Title</i>	<i>Categorisation</i>
Golden Spur	Blood Royal
Royal Privilege	Denoted Doctor of Law (although rarely used)
Mesnadero	Cadet branches of noble families
Franco	Commoners

Likewise the office and rank of Constable was found in Castile, but not Aragon. The Condestable (Constable) was a hereditary rank passed through the Velasco family, where the Constable was deemed second official in the kingdom after the king. Neither Aragon nor Castile used the rank of Baron, although it survived in Catalonia.

Portugal

The Portuguese nobility followed the pattern of those in Aragon and Castile to a great extent. This kingdom also used the titles from duke to baron and the lower nobility comprised cavaleiros (knights) and escudeiros (squires). The term *fidelgo* became synonymous with the rank of nobility.

Italy

The nobility in Italy were the most socially mobile of any in Europe, and here it was possible to become a territorial prince purely by military success, regardless of birth; an example is the Sforza family of Milan. The system in Italy was never rigid, and the title prince, for example, could denote someone who ruled a principality or one who was subordinate to the Emperor. In the republics, the title *patrician* denoted an urban nobility.

Italy used the common titles of Europe: prince, duke, marquess, count and baron, but rarely viscount. Baron was the most common title and was linked to feudal land holdings, but did not always denote rank when used as a collective term.

Scotland

The Scottish nobility used the same terms to denote rank as those used elsewhere in Europe. Scotland was divided into Lowland and Highland areas, which had different social strata. The Lowland areas resembled the rest of Europe closely, with dukes, mostly of the Blood Royal, earls, barons and lairds (gentlemen). There were no medieval viscounts in Scotland.

In the Highland areas the population was divided into clans, headed by a chief, a rank passed by primogeniture to the eldest son. Below the chief were the 'fine', comprising the leading families in the clan, then tacksman (daoine usisle) but neither of these two ranks were considered to be noble.

Summary

Across Europe in our period there were many similarities in the nobility as an elite group of people who had the right to be in the presence of and advise kings, and who held land from which they received an income. They also married within their own class, and the bloodlines of these families were mixed across Continental Europe, especially by marriage, from at least 1100. They all used the same set of titles based on ranks found in the Roman Empire, prince, duke, marquess, count, viscount and baron. Their origins, in the same way as kingship, were in a much earlier period than our own and were unchallenged to a great degree. There was an entrenched presumption that one section of society had authority over others, and this authority was wide ranging, not just in terms of justice, but also in many of the basic areas of life, such as freedom to move between locations and choice of overlord.

But nobility as a rank and concept was not static. The superiority of the nobility from 1300 was being diluted in most countries by the entry into this class by people who were rewarded for personal service to kings and emperors, either military or in government. These rewards were titles, estates and noble marriages, and they happened at all levels of the nobility, although the increase in the lower levels was disproportionate as the higher nobility, often those with the Blood Royal, were harder to penetrate. So while the ranks of the nobility in general were being increased by these

rewards, in fact the gulf between the lower nobility and higher nobility was widening. In turn, the higher nobilities of each country were able to obtain superior privileges from those in the lower orders, maintaining this gap. Important distinctions within this group were often the land attached to a title or the age of the award, not just the title itself.

The influence of Roman Law on Continental Europe also changed the nature of inherited nobility. In earlier periods, children inherited the rank of their mother, but under Roman Law this was changed to the rank of their father. Genealogies were increasingly commissioned to highlight longevity in noble families, some of which glossed over any such marriage that might have brought much-needed assets to an impoverished noble family. These were often conveniently forgotten within a short time. This was also reflected in the growing relationship between some of the nobility and the merchant classes of urban areas; but it was still true to say that the nobility had a rural and landlord base, rather than one of commercial trade.

The nobility of Europe in our period were well established and varied. While those in Poland wrested power from their kings in the early sixteenth century, in France and the Spanish kingdoms, the rulers were moving towards an absolute monarchy, nullifying many of the nobility's powers. Others, such as the English nobility retained their privileges and status within a limited monarchy. Not all dukes, marquesses, earls/counts or barons had the same level of authority within their own kingdoms, and this was replicated across Europe, with the title of duke being more significant in some areas than others, for example. But what is clear is that in a stratified society, the nobility were a formidable group with considerable power and influence, whose lives were lived in often conspicuous consumption in comparison to the lower sections of society in late medieval Europe. These members often appear as major players in events of the period, both in war and in peace.

Further reading

- Birke, A.M. and Ronald, G., *Princes, Patronage and the Nobility: The Court at the Beginning of the Modern Age, c.1450–1650* (London, 1991)
- Denton, J.H., ed., *Orders and Hierarchies in Late Medieval and Renaissance Europe* (Basingstoke, 1999)
- Duggan, A., ed., *Nobles and Nobility in Medieval Europe: Concepts, Origins, Transformations* (Woodbridge, 2000)

Women in medieval Europe

Traditionally the writing of narratives of elite males, and political and ecclesiastical history have dominated history, especially in the nineteenth century. The development of 'history from below' and gender studies since the Second World War and especially the 1960s has moved on from this position. Gender studies and especially the history of women is now a respected area of academic research, but it is a contentious issue in gender studies that women are treated as 'separate', when in fact their lives were always intrinsic to life in general. Although women and men did live in the same society this chapter will look at the experience of women and their lives in different contexts, while acknowledging that these were often within a male dominated society. Whereas women may not have had much overt power in this period, they were not always powerless.

Women in the medieval period were in many ways very similar to those of today, acting as mothers, sisters, daughters and often lovers. It was the conventions of the time that dictated how these relationships evolved, developed and operated. Society and its rules were different from ours, and women's experiences need to be seen in this context, rather than judged in comparison to today's society. Women of all types lived with men, even those who chose to live a secluded, religious life away from society, as men were needed to act as their priests to perform Mass. This activity was barred (and still is) for women in the Roman Catholic Church. Women as wives, daughters, widows or nuns also required men to administer their lands, provide legal support and act as overseers. In general terms if men of this period could be categorised (VERY roughly) as monks, knights or peasants, then women could be categorised as wives, mothers or virgins

(that is those who dedicated their lives to the Church).

One major way in which their lives were different from women today, is that women always lived with their families (secular or religious), whether that family was formed by (but not in the modern sense), marriage or birth. Women did not leave these homes unless under duress, except to marry or enter the Church. The choice to set up a home as an independent woman was not an option, and it was not common for adult women to remain at home unmarried; indeed the spinster role was in many ways demonised.

Women will be studied through the events that regulated their lives: for secular women, marriage, childbirth or widowhood; for nuns, their religious experience. In all cases, their experience was determined to a large degree by their birth and relative rank in society in the same way as men.

Social status

For women the experience of life depended entirely on the family in which they were born. Distinctions of class (but not the terms Upper, Middle or Lower as these concepts were not understood by people of the time) were very important and often very rigid in this period. One's family origins, connections and status dictated the type of life one may expect, and movement between these social groupings was rare. For this discussion of women they will be considered in three broad social groups, *elite* – including royalty, *middling* – gentry and merchant classes and *peasant* – those with no property and reliant on work from the other two groups. The term 'working class' is also not relevant to this period.

Marriage

By 1300 the Church had succeeded in bringing the rite of marriage within its control. This was facilitated by the dictates of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215), which required both parties to agree to the marriage and then post banns of the proposed match in local parish churches. This attempt at greater control was part of the process started by the Gregorian Reforms of Pope Gregory VII (1073–85) in the eleventh century. But it must be stated that while the Church attempted to gain this control over marriage, this control was not total or the only way in which marriages could be undertaken, and these alternatives had equal status. The alternative to a church sanctioned rite was simply a verbal statement of intent to marry from both parties, either in private or in public, known as a

‘clandestine’ marriage. This statement was sufficient for a marriage to be considered valid, as the central premise for a marriage was the consent of the two parties, and a mutual statement of such. If this declaration was followed by a consummation of the marriage, then it was entirely legal. The only caveats to such a marriage were that both parties were ‘of age’ (twelve for girls and fourteen for boys) and that neither were contracted to marry anyone else. Of course it was much better for a marriage to be publicly celebrated, to avoid doubt or bigamy, and for the status of the couple to be verified, but these were not required to make the marriage binding. The legitimacy of children was also a very important consideration, and a public marriage in church or even a later blessing conferred legitimacy and removed any threat of illegitimacy for children, an important consideration in respect of inheritance. Issues relating to these verbal/‘clandestine’ marriages can often be seen in church court records, not because the Church considered them invalid, but because problems emerged, such as pre-contracts.

A verbal contract for a marriage could be extended to include the future. Known as future consent, for example, ‘I will marry you when I have finished my apprenticeship’ was lawful. The consummation of the contract made this statement equally binding, as it was understood to have been contracted in the sight of God.

Clandestine marriages were widespread across Europe, being particularly common in Portugal and Spain, but rarer in France and Italy. This situation continued until the Council of Trent in 1563, when these clandestine marriages were discouraged; but, of course, this dictat applied only to the Roman Catholic Church. It can be seen that over time churches and states exerted more power over the rite of marriage.

As consent for a marriage was necessary, there were cases where girls (and sometimes boys) were beaten, pressurised or imprisoned by family members or their guardians to ensure compliance, but this was not a common feature of the age. Where these cases appear in church court records, it can be seen that compulsion normally involved some financial considerations. Should a woman wish to state that her marriage was a result of coercion, an appeal could be heard in Church courts, and the marriage might be dissolved, however, consummation made the situation much more complicated.

The emphasis on consent of the union was also reflected in the treatment of those who lacked sufficient mental awareness to understand the situation. This situation was recognised, though the illnesses or syndromes themselves might not be understood in the modern sense. But again, in the

Church records there were occasions when for other reasons this consideration was ignored. There are cases where women termed as ‘idiots’ but who were heiresses were married, occasionally more than once; but generally this edict afforded them some degree of protection.

The age of consent for marriage was set at twelve for girls and fourteen for boys. This limit was based on the Classical idea that these ages represented puberty, and therefore the ability to produce children – the fundamental purpose of marriage. To modern eyes this is very young, but these very early marriages were not common, and efforts were made to protect young people, especially girls, from the known dangers of early consummation of marriage and subsequent pregnancy. A notable exception to this was Margaret Beaufort (1443–1509), mother of Henry VII (1457–1509) of England, who gave birth to her son aged just thirteen years in 1457. This was a scandal at the time and does not represent a common trend. Girls were generally considered old enough for this role at 15/16, (the same applied for boys) and often marriage contracts made these stipulations. This type of early marriage was more common in the elite sections of society; evidence suggests that other sections of society contracted marriages at an older age.

On a practical note, marriages could not take place in the period of Lent (40 days before Easter) or during Advent (four weeks before Christmas). Most people were married in the porch of a church rather than the body of the church itself. This was especially true of the middling and peasant sorts. After being married in the porch or at the church door, the couple would then enter the church for mass and blessing. The requirement to record these ceremonies was not consistent across Europe for the period under study, being a more widespread phenomenon from the sixteenth century.

It was not unknown for couples of both advanced years and of childbearing age to declare themselves celibates within their marriage. This was often in a religious context and was another way of living a pious life within the rite of marriage. These cases were often voluntary on the part of one partner, but might not be consensual. In these cases the Church often supported the partner who chose celibacy. The idea of celibacy within marriage also involved the interesting idea of ‘virginity’, especially that of women, being a retrospective state that could be achieved through a later, celibate life.

Betrothal

Betrothal, or the promise to marry, was considered very important in the

medieval period, and in many cases this was a legal contract. It could be overturned, often for political reasons, within the elite section of society. If children were betrothed by their parents before their age of 'reason', set at seven, it could be challenged by the participants when they came of age and the marriage was about to be conducted. The Church did protect children in this area; in the same way, those placed into monastic houses as young children were offered release from any promises made before this age of reason.

Proxy marriage

It was not necessary for the bride and groom to know each other before marriage or even to be in the same place for the marriage ceremony. It was common when two people from different countries were to be married for a proxy to take the place of one of them. In these circumstances the proxy, or stand in, would represent one of the couple in a marriage ceremony, which was as legally binding as if both parties were present.

Degrees of consanguinity

Marriage under the auspices of the Church was prohibited within certain 'degrees' of relationship. Again, the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) decreed how closely related people could be and still be allowed to marry; this was called 'consanguinity'. The Council made it clear that those within the second degree (siblings) and third degree (uncle/niece, aunt/nephew and first cousins) of blood relatedness were forbidden to marry. These relationships also applied to those 'related' by a godparent/spiritual relationship or those who had previous sexual relationships not regulated by marriage.

There were obviously examples when this dictate was ignored, and appeals to the Papal Court could result in exceptions or dispensations. The Hapsburg dynasty of Spain is often used as an example of how marriage within these degrees of consanguinity could have disastrous effects. From 1450 to 1700, the family frequently married close relatives, for example between uncle and niece or first cousins. Over time, these resulted in certain physical features being prominent, the Hapsburg jaw, for example, and also in increased deformity and other disabilities in the family. While this example extends beyond our period, it did start in the middle of the fifteenth century and continued for a considerable length of time. The question needs to be asked why families would decide to marry within such

close degrees, and the reasons are both financial and ones of status. By keeping marriages within a close group, any assets remained between them. Bringing in outsiders would dilute power. The attempts to limit the influence of ‘outsiders’, suggests that a woman joining a family could be a threat in some way. These women could have greater influence over their partners than that held by the partner’s other existing family members, and their children could have divided loyalties between paternal and maternal families. By marrying more closely within a family or clan these risks were mitigated, but this practice led to other, perhaps more serious, physical problems within a few generations.

As seen before, complications due to consanguinity were mostly confined to elite families, especially royal ones, for whom control over land and influence led to these prohibited degrees of consanguinity being ignored when it suited political ambitions. In other areas issues due to inbreeding were the result of physical remoteness rather than deliberate attempts to control such power and influence. There was awareness, though it was not understood in the modern sense, that a close relationship (while beneficial in terms of land holdings) could have a negative impact. And such close marriages were seen as against the law of nature as well as the will of God.

Dowries

A dowry was a negotiated amount of money or goods that was supplied by a bride’s family to that of the groom, normally at the time of a marriage. A dowry was relevant at all levels of society, and indeed one of the Spiritual Acts of Mercy could be to supply a dowry for poor women in this period. In this particular case it had many benefits, both spiritual and social; marriage was encouraged by the teachings of the Church, and it also helped people avoid the sin of fornication and ensured that any children of the union would be born legitimate.

While dowries were negotiated before a match, they were often paid in instalments after the ceremony. A famous case of this policy causing a problem was the proxy marriage in 1499 of Arthur (1486–1502), son of Henry VII (1457–1509) of England, to Catherine of Aragon (1485–1536), daughter of Ferdinand of Aragon (r. 1479–1516) and Isabella of Castile (r. 1474–1504). Henry VII encountered many problems extracting the agreed dowry of 200,000 crowns from the bride’s parents after the marriage, and especially after the death of Isabella in 1504 and even the bridegroom himself in 1502. This situation did not stop Henry VII from continuing to

fight for this dowry.

Likewise the Orkney Islands were, until 1468, under the control of the kings of Norway. These islands were pledged as surety for the dowry by Christian I of Norway (1426–81) for his daughter, Margaret (1456–86), who married James III of Scotland (1451–88). The dowry was never paid and the islands remained as Scottish territory.

Dowries were related to the social status of the two families and for those in the merchant classes these could take the form of business assets as well as money.

Annulment/divorce

Annulment and divorce were the only ways other than death that a marriage could be ended. Annulments were granted by the Church courts after investigation had declared a marriage invalid – in effect it had not existed legally. A divorce, meanwhile, allowed the parties to live separately, but conceded that the marriage was legal. Thus it was what in modern terms is a legal separation, but no more; and while it allowed the parties to live separately they could not then remarry. In effect, a divorce only ended the obligation to share ‘bed and board’. Divorces were rare and only granted on the grounds of cruelty or adultery. Research suggests that there were national differences in the success of these cases, even though the rules under the auspices of the Church should have been the same. It appears that it was harder to get a judicial separation/divorce in England than in the Franco-Belgium area, perhaps not co-incidentally an area where clandestine marriage was viewed with greater suspicion and often resulted in excommunication.

Annulments – where a marriage contract was ruled as null and void – were by far the most common way to end a marriage. These procedures were undertaken in the church courts, not the secular courts, and though more common they were not easy to obtain. When an annulment was granted it was possible for both parties to remarry, and this may explain why it was the most popular method for ending a marriage in this period.

Annulment could be claimed for several reasons, some of which have been discussed above: pre-contract by one of the parties, duress or one of the parties being under age. Other reasons for annulments that were considered acceptable include non-consummation or impotence. An interesting point to be noted is that marriages between different classes of people were not sufficient reasons for a marriage to be annulled.

Elite marriage

Marriage between both elite families and royalty were not love matches in this period; they were more like negotiated settlements. While young children were often betrothed, these betrothals could be tactical, and many did not result in marriage when the children came of age. The arranged nature of these unions was an accepted fact of life, and they sometimes resulted in other relationships by the male partner in the form of mistresses and bastard children, but it was very rare for women to act in the same way. While it was seen as more acceptable for men to act in this way for women such behaviour was much more significant, as it was essential that there was no doubt over the paternity of their children. These needed to be progeny of their spouse, as children were the heirs of their inherited land, titles and family honour. It was only by the 'accepted' virtue of their wives that men could be sure that the children of their wives were their own, as there were no paternity tests other than inherited physical characteristics. This situation was not considered a particular double standard of the times, and the need for the almost guaranteed virtue of the women can even be demonstrated in physical buildings, where analysis of palace and castle layouts can show how much harder it was to reach the private rooms of a queen in comparison to those of a king.

While children and heirs were an important aspect of all marriages, the relationships and links they created were important for both parties. For a bride the opportunity to advance the interests of her native land or family could be vital, and the value of 'pillow talk' should not be underestimated. Most elite women also travelled with a large retinue, and these could also help or hinder new relationships. Likewise for the groom the new relationships developed through marriage, often including commercial elements, were to be exploited as long as it suited them. The relative status of the families of each partner was understood as a 'pecking order' that stretched across Europe. Marriages often demonstrate who was considered more powerful at any one time in the changing political landscapes of both individual countries and Europe as a whole.

While these political alliances could be an advantage, in time they could also lead to problems. This was especially true when royal marriages transferred a claim to a foreign throne or titles. A claim could be transmitted through female children who married abroad or into other dynasties. The Hundred Years' War between France and England (1337–1453) was a dynastic struggle at its heart: Edward III of England (1312–77) claimed the throne of France through his mother Isabella, (1295–1358),

daughter of Philip of IV of France. In fact, the use of ancient Salic Law in France did not allow the right to the throne to be transmitted through the female line, but this did not stop Edward III attempting to make good his claim through force. Examples of this can be seen throughout Europe both in royal and noble families.

A successful wife produced children, especially at least one healthy son, as this was a period of primogeniture in the royal and noble families, where the eldest son inherited the estates and titles of the father intact. Other sons would be provided for through advantageous marriages to heiresses (generally those without a surviving brother), or enter the church for a career in public service, where family connections and rank were still valuable. Daughters were useful as marriage partners to augment family connections. This suggests a sense of children being unloved and only useful in a dynastic sense, but this was not true and evidence does survive of the grief of parents whose children died before them. It was not expected that female children would remain in their parents' households after a marriage was contracted.

A change in alliances and allegiances could also render a favourable marriage partner in one period being a liability in another and the changing political landscape of the period made such alliances rather problematic. But rarely were these marriages set aside when the political climate changed. This may be due to a personal relationship between the couple, a regard for the children of the union or indifference, and all could be suggested at different times.

Middling marriage

The marriages of the middling sort, both gentry and merchant, often had the same pattern as those of the elite families, in that they were often conducted for financial benefit. Dowries were negotiated, and factions in cities, towns or counties could be represented in many of these unions. The majority of these marriages stayed within their own class of citizen, be it gentry or merchant.

For merchants, the aim in a marriage was to keep capital, investments and property within their orbit, and marriages were calculated to achieve this. Generally, merchant families did not survive as long as noble ones, and therefore marriage networks in cities and towns were complex and extensive. In a period of often multiple marriages, these networks remained strong, and were potentially wider than noble ones. They differed from those in the elite class, where primogeniture lent a need to keep estates and

inheritances intact for the eldest son; this was not an overriding need of merchant classes, who were free to distribute their wealth among several of their children. In merchant classes, therefore, marriage offered different commercial and social advantages.

Gentry lived in the same system of inheritance as the noble families, that is, primogeniture, and they operated in a similar fashion, albeit at a lower social rank.

Peasant Marriage

Peasants also believed in the sanctity and value of marriage, but few records survive to tell us about their experience, except court records, which reveal when things went wrong. It is understood that while many noble or royal people married young, many in the peasant class undertook this much later, with women marrying between the ages of eighteen to twenty-two. This later marriage enabled the women's families to enjoy the benefit of their labour for a longer period. The marriage celebration, such as it was, would be brief and probably only celebrated with a wedding ale and no feast.

The greatest difference for peasant women was that they exercised a great deal more choice in their partner than the other groups. They were able to meet and get to know their prospective partners, through a publically conducted courtship. Many marriages were as a result of pregnancy, and the man was expected to accept his responsibilities. If a child was born out of marriage its status changed should a marriage occur.

While marriage meant working with their husbands rather than their fathers in agricultural labour, they still bore the majority of responsibility for household duties, including spinning and weaving.

Childbirth

The ability to produce healthy offspring was a primary function of married women. For elite women this was to provide legal heirs for their families, both maternal and paternal. All births were expected to be within a marriage, and illegitimacy was a social impediment that often required church court action to be overcome, often forcing a father to accept responsibility for a child.

There were very few hospitals and most births took place at home. Childbirth was an extremely dangerous event for women, as death rates for both mother and child were high, and women were encouraged to prepare

their souls in case of death. There is evidence for medical hospitals being founded by women in France and the Low Countries in our period, which specifically offered help to pregnant poor women. Their reach was very limited and should not be compared with facilities or expectations today. But it must be said that while it was dangerous, many women did have large families, as contraception was rudimentary and frowned on by the Church.

Childbirth was a female experience, as men were not generally permitted to be in attendance, except priests in difficult labours. In these cases they were on hand to offer the Last Rites if necessary and water was always available to baptise babies that died or were expected to. Midwives were also able to baptise these babies, the only evidence of women being able to perform any religious rites. While the study of obstetrics resulted in learned treatises on the subject, the experience and knowledge of midwives who attended the majority of births is not known, and these women were more generally in attendance rather than male doctors. Midwives were not entirely ungoverned; there is evidence of apprenticeships in the craft, for example, and some midwives in France were 'sworn' into their profession. But no written records of this training survive to allow an assessment of the level of their learning. In the past, this lack of records has led to a perceived division between those doctors learned in the science of childbirth and the midwives who had practical experience that has contributed to an often-negative picture of midwives and childbirth in this period. The study of the books of obstetrics, which have a long history into the Classical period augmented by Arabic texts, has been widely studied to the detriment of the practical experience of midwives, whose place in the historical record is extremely limited.

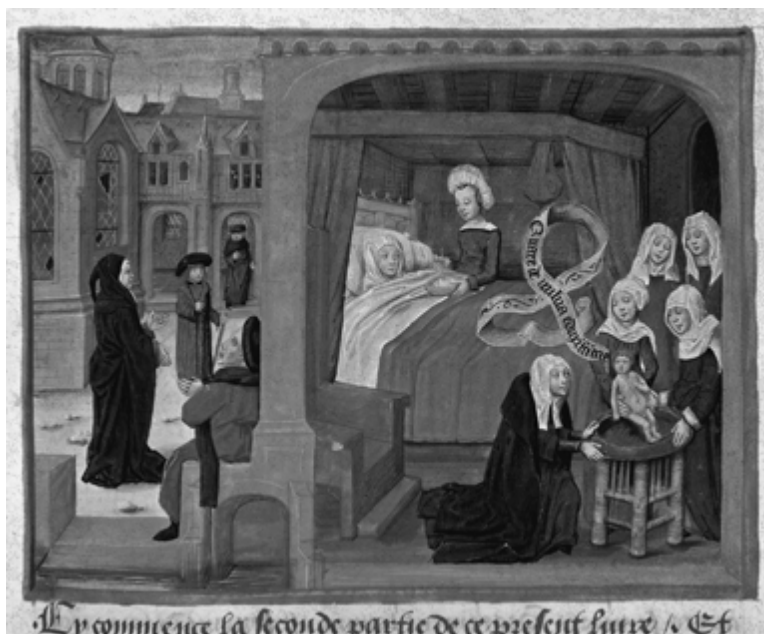


Figure 5.1
 Childbirth (fifteenth-century French illustration)

Source: © Bibliotheque de L'Arsenal, Paris, France/Archives Charmet/Bridgeman Images

The Church was involved in both the attitudes relating to childbirth, that is, birth within marriage, avoidance of adultery and illegitimacy, and also in the practical issues of childbirth. It was not unknown for a parish priest to offer public advice to parents and mothers of young babies, including the avoidance of heavy work in pregnancy, not keeping young babies in the marital bed (as the dangers of suffocation were known), the benefits of breast feeding their own children (the use of wet nurses was common for elite women) and also avoiding the dangers of water and fire for young children.

As might be expected, the Church had also developed spiritual help for mothers in pregnancy and childbirth, and there were specific saints who were able to help in these circumstances. As the mother of Christ, the Blessed Virgin Mary was often invoked for assistance and she also received grateful thanks for a successful delivery. Another popular saint across Europe was St Margaret of Antioch, whose girdle especially (one of which was held at Waltham Abbey, England) was considered helpful for women during labour. There is evidence that queens travelled to this English shrine for assistance, or even had the girdle brought to them at times of delivery.

Promises were often made during the travails of labour to go on pilgrimages by both mother and father, and these promises were often credited with a miraculous recovery of the mother and safe delivery of the baby.

While of course the majority of babies were born within marriage, many others were illegitimate. In the same way as hospitals were founded to assist poor mothers in childbirth there was also charitable help for unwed mothers. Often the father was known, and was compelled through the church courts to support the mother and child or even forced into marriage. Where this was not possible, women could be offered practical help in pregnancy and birth and then provided with a dowry to enable them to marry later.

The actual process of childbirth did not involve any equipment that might be seen today. The invention of forceps was a seventeenth-century innovation that was kept as a closely guarded family secret for many years. Caesarean births were only performed as a last resort, in an attempt to save the baby when the mother had died. It was never considered an attempt to save the life of the mother. Midwives relied on manual techniques to help a mother and baby in distress.

Perceptions of medieval birth do give an impression of lack of knowledge of both skills and hygiene. While knowledge about germs was not as today, the instructions that survive from the hospitals that included care for pregnant women do give an impression of what was seen as beneficial, and this included bathing three times a week. The deaths of mothers from puerperal infections can therefore be seen in the context of lack of antibiotic treatments, rather than a complete unawareness of the need for cleanliness.

Widows

Given the high mortality rates of our period, it is perhaps not surprising that this was a period of multiple marriages for both men and women. For women, in particular, being left a widow had implications different from today. When a marriage included a dowry and marriage settlement, the prospect of the bride becoming a widow was included in these negotiations and financial provision was often included in this document. It was not automatic that a wife inherited her husband's assets on death, especially if this was in the form of land and estates that passed, by the process of primogeniture, to the eldest son. What was included in marriage negotiations was the proportion of these lands that would support a widow

on the death of her husband, and this often closely reflected any lands or money that she brought to the union at marriage. As some women did marry multiple times, it was possible that they could accrue several such incomes. The fifteenth century has been dubbed the century of the widows, especially in England and France, as many dowager duchesses and countesses lived for considerable periods after their husbands, and by effectively splitting the estates of their sons, reduced their income proportionally. In these cases being a widow was an advantage, with no more dangers of childbirth, financial freedom and, if the king was petitioned, the right to either choose their next partner or not to marry again at all.

For middling sorts these advantages were the same. Evidence survives of widows of trade guild members who took over the husbands' businesses after their deaths, and ran them, including engaging apprentices in this capacity. Again, these women were able to make choices about subsequent marriages that were often to their own advantage in terms of safety, protection and finance. The status of widows in these contexts was a benefit, while for those in the lower, peasant class it was not always such a healthy picture. Many widows who were left with land to work struggled, especially if they had no adult children to assist them. For them a subsequent marriage would help in terms of both work and protection.

Widows, especially those with assets, were occasionally susceptible to abduction by suitors, and the subsequent perception of loss of virtue often required a marriage with the abductor. In many peasant communities widows could also be viewed as suspicious characters. These women, having no protection from a male, could succumb to accusations of witchcraft. It appears that widows required a certain financial status to avoid these situations.

The role of religion in the life of a widow is also interesting and worthy of note. For those with financial freedom there was an impetus to found intercessionary recognition for their husbands and themselves; it was often a request in surviving wills. This may have been in addition to any such provision made during their lifetimes. Being buried with a husband was also common, the choice being which husband in the case of multiple marriages. Relatively few monuments survive to women that are not linked to their husbands, and joint tombs are more common than those of women on their own. While commemorative brasses can be found across Europe depicting a man with more than one wife, there are few depicting a wife with all her husbands.

A widow was also able to join religious life, mostly by choice. She could

enter a monastic house (as could men) on a corrody – a guarantee of bed and board for life, including an allowance for servants, in exchange for a donation of money or land. In the later periods, corrodies often became a drain on monastic finances, and their use declined. Other widows could enter a monastic house in a sorority capacity, enjoying the religious lifestyle but never becoming a nun.

In many ways, being a widow in our period might seem to have had several advantages, but this was only a reality when they had some financial backing. For those without this vital element life could be very hard, and the high rate of known multiple marriages suggests that marriage as an institution did offer many benefits, and these should not be dismissed. While for some elite woman widowhood offered freedom, for many others it did not, and subsequent marriages offering financial stability, protection and companionship were not dismissed lightly.

Religious women

Women were able to fulfil their religious vocation in monastic houses, but were never able to work in parishes as men did; as women were unable to perform mass, they could not have the ‘cure of souls’. The older and larger female monastic houses across Europe founded in the High Middle Ages (c.1000–1300) were often well endowed with land and had a good income, but many of the smaller houses were poor. Monastic life was not the only avenue for women to express their religious convictions, and they could also become anchoresses (see below), or act as patrons for all types of churches. But options in the religious context were very much more limited than those available to men. In general, all types of monastic houses were rarely founded after 1300, and there were always fewer houses for women than men. Nevertheless, there were important female monastic foundations, and many of these earlier foundations had abbesses who were influential on both the national and international arenas. Recent studies are bringing the experience of late medieval religious women into focus and widening our knowledge about their religious experience.

Monastic life

Women became nuns for a variety of reasons, sometimes including duress. There are records of women forced into the religious life in Italy in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century, whose lifestyle was considered shocking, but generally this was not the case. Given the centrality of the

Church in medieval life it is not surprising that women were motivated by the same religious fervour as men.

The religious orders for women followed the same pattern as those men, and every Order developed houses for both men and women. The majority of these religious houses for men and women were completely separate, and not linked in any way. Some religious houses were founded for both men and women, but most of these were very short-lived. One exception to this was the entirely English Order of Gilbertines who had some monastic houses for both monks and nuns, for example, Sempringham, Lincolnshire. In these cases the monks and nuns lived in separate cloisters, sharing only their church.

Nuns were expected to live their daily lives in seclusion from the outside world, but this was not entirely possible, as they needed to see priests regularly to attend mass. Priests also acted as confessors and spiritual guides, and men were needed for the administration of their estates in many different practical capacities. It was impossible for a nun to be completely separate from the company of men.

Recent research has found that many nuns, unlike their male counterparts, were generally not able to read or write in Latin, only their vernacular language. They were able to recite their prayers, sing anthems and chant psalms, etc. in Latin, but were not able to read any works in the language of the Church. This is not to say that nuns were uneducated, but they were not taught Latin in the local grammar schools for children, which often excluded girls. While many bishops were unhappy about this level of education in Latin, a practical solution was to write the Rules of their monastic orders in their vernacular tongue in our period. While this lack of Latin might have been an impediment to the study of the many theological texts of the age, it does not imply a lesser commitment to the religious life. The lack of skills in reading Latin was also levelled at choristers and even some parish priests of the period and was not limited to just nuns.

While the older female foundations were often well endowed, many of the smaller houses of nuns were comparatively poor. It was not an option by 1300 for a woman to enter a nunnery for free and expect it to support her in bed and board. Nunneries, like marriage, required the family to provide a dowry on entry, and families often contributed financially to their keep on an annual basis as well. This proved to be a problem, as rather than endow the house of the nuns, this income was related to an individual and often ceased on her death. Therefore, the house was not able to invest this sum in property or in other means of generating a communal income. This situation was very different from the male houses where this individual

endowment did not take place and was not required in the same way. This problem contributed to the relative poverty of many female houses over time.

There were nunneries of different social status, both high and low, in every country, and the relative status of the nuns reflected this. For example, the nunnery of Caen in France, founded by Matilda (c.1031–82) the wife of William the Conqueror of England (c.1028–87) was always a high-status house, attracting novices from high-status families. Likewise, in England, the house of Romsey, founded by Anglo Saxon royalty, still attracted ladies of high social status in our period. This was also reflected in their relative wealth.

The conduct of nuns has often been the subject of study, and their disobedience, breaking of rules and lack of religious attendance has been noted. The records that support these were often compiled during the visitations of bishops (or their deputies), whose sole aim was to investigate wrongdoings. While these can be interesting and often entertaining examples of where monastic life went wrong, it should be remembered that this was the point of these documents, and that they were never intended to offer a balanced view of monastic life. Hence, those many nuns who lived demure and devout lives rarely appear in the records. This was the case for both male and female monastic houses: the surviving records, based on these visitations or on financial transactions, leave an unbalanced view of religious life, as their principal function – that of a life of prayer – was unrecorded as long as it continued in the normal way.

Anchorites/ anchoresses

The later medieval period saw a great number of lay women across Europe live a different type of religious life, that of an anchorite/ anchoress. An anchorite made a vow to be ‘anchored’ to one space, normally a cell attached to a church, in which they were ceremonially bricked up. An anchoress entering this space was in many ways considered ‘dead to the world’, and existing in a liminal space between life and death. This was to enable them to pray for their own soul and those of others and often offering spiritual guidance. Their lives were ascetic and spiritual and many were considered living saints.

These anchorite cells had two openings, one via a squint into the church to enable them to view the mass and especially the Elevation of the Host. There was also another window to the street where they could receive gifts of charity from the outside world and also converse with many people

especially if they were seen as spiritual guides.

One of the most famous anchoresses was Julian of Norwich (1342–c.1416), who wrote the first known book in English by a woman. Her real name is not known, Julian refers to the church to which she was attached. She experienced dreams and visions of Jesus that became the focus of her writing. Men could be anchorites in the same way as women, that is, being anchored to a single church. Hermits were men who chose the same lifestyle but were not linked to a particular area. These lifestyle choices were in the old Christian tradition of those living apart from the world, the forerunner of the monastic lifestyle.

Religious patrons/founders

The role of a founder of a religious institution was an important one in the Middle Ages. Founders or patrons who provided resources to establish a religious house or, increasingly after 1300, a chantry, were entitled to certain privileges and rights. These resources were often in the form of land. Descendants of these founders became patrons; they still had considerable influence and were often to be seen meddling in the affairs of these institutions.

Patronage was often passed down through noble families and included women. Being a patron of a religious house gave lay/secular women an active role in religious matters not available in any other way. Being a founder or patron of a chantry or a monastery entitled the patron to be included in the prayers of the church benefitting their soul as well as rights over the appointment of personnel. Patrons of many chantries were women who set these up in memory of their husbands, naming themselves as recipients of the benefit of the masses as well.

The founding of monasteries by women does show some preference for female houses over those for men, but not by a marked degree. Many women founded nunneries to provide themselves with a place for their own retirement, a popular choice for noble women of this period. Several of these founders were widows for the reasons given above, and as widows they did not need their husband's permission to donate land or other resources to the religious house.

Being a patron of a religious house entitled these women to be buried in its church; this is the source of the anomaly still seen of female burial in male monastic houses, which can only be due to their role as patrons. Patronage gave not only spiritual benefits but also prestige and influence, and it was not uncommon for patrons to influence the appointment of the

senior monks or nuns or the acceptance of certain novices, and to demand spiritual benefits without further financial outlay.

Female patrons and founders were not as common as male ones, but they were still a substantial minority, which has been calculated at ten per cent in France. Many women followed family patterns and traditions and had long histories of relationships with the houses their forebears founded. While not a topic much discussed, the role of female patrons is an interesting one in relation to the overall female contribution to a church often seen only through a male perspective, and it deserves to be acknowledged.

Inheritance

In this period of primogeniture in elite families, the rights of female heirs need to be considered. Not all assets were devolved to the eldest son; other children were often given other assets during the lifetime of their parents. It was the principal estate of the parents including titles that were kept as intact as possible for future generations. For those couples who had no surviving sons and only female heirs the situation was variable. Some titles had a bar to female succession, and in this case male cousins, often very remote, might inherit. Should daughters be able to inherit, the principle of primogeniture did not apply, and the estate and right to titles could be split between daughters. A man marrying a daughter could often petition the king to be granted the hereditary title through the right of his wife.

Summary

This can only ever be a very general depiction of the role of women in our period. The Middle Ages was a deeply hierarchical society and women lived within the constraints this imposed. Women are often absent from many of the documents previously used to study history, for example the actions of kings, bishops and in the law, but this balance is shifting. The fact that they are not always visible does not mean they did not contribute to society at all levels. Women worked hard in the agricultural sphere, in trade, in the religious world and also in diplomacy, with energy and influence, despite these limitations. We often find stories of those women who defied these restrictions, but only as anomalies. It is true to say that while women may have contributed in many different spheres it was the domestic one in which their major contribution was undertaken, again at all levels of society. By domestic we mean the care of the house –not

necessarily the manual labour itself and the care of children. Whatever modern thoughts are about the role of women outside of this domestic sphere, it is true that for most women of our period the domestic responsibility was their principal concern.

We often find women in the historical record at times of crisis in their lives – on becoming widows or mentioned in wills, both their own and that of their families, and while these provide a great deal of information this period of crisis must be acknowledged. The furtherance of gender studies in relation to women is a thriving area of research that can only help illuminate their part of the historical story to benefit our wider understanding of the period.

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Children and education

The experience of children in the late medieval period was, like that of women, not a separate part of life, but deeply entwined within it. Our knowledge about the lives and experiences of children in this period has also been the subject of greater study in recent decades, but there is still much to learn. The experiences of children, like those of men and women, were dependent on the social class into which they were born and similarly this was a rigid placement in society with little movement between classes. This period does show that education could elevate men, not women, through patronage into positions of responsibility and power, in both the laity and Church.

The study of medieval children was for many years dominated by the idea that the medieval period did not recognise childhood as a phase of life, and children were not viewed with any emotion. While recent research has countered this idea with evidence, both visual and written, the reader must beware of seeing childhood through modern eyes. Children were cared for and loved, but in a different context, and love may have been shown in different ways from today. The idea of placing a child in a monastery at a young age might seem harsh, but if this guaranteed the child food and shelter in difficult conditions then it was the intentions that need to be considered, not just the action itself. The evidence from many surviving tombs or commemorative brasses indicates that for many the children who died before their parents were still important. Some of these include carvings or etchings of all of the children born to a couple with those that predeceased their parents depicted in shrouds, often indicating the age at which they died as well. This can be seen across Europe, and these can give

a glimpse into family life not seen in other sources.

The age at which young people ceased to be children and moved into the adult world was closely aligned with puberty, which was seen as twelve years for girls and fourteen for boys. This did not assume at these ages that they lived adult lives; indeed, in many spheres this age limit had no value, but does represent the change from childhood, into a proto-adult phase.

Children shall be considered through the different phases of life that can be compared to the classical idea of the 'ages of man', namely birth to seven years – being a child and playing – and from seven to fourteen years seen as adolescence. The general treatment of medieval children conforms to this division.

Birth

As soon as a child was born it was baptised into the Christian Church. As noted, before baptism could be performed by a priest or in extreme circumstances by a midwife, to avoid a child dying outside of the family of the Church. The high rates of infant mortality have led some historians to posit that mothers did not love these infants, as they might have expected them to die, but evidence for this is hard to find. There are surviving bodies of evidence to suggest that the death of a baby affected the parents greatly, not just in terms of losing an heir.

Christening involved up to three godparents, and this was a role that had serious implications, with a godparent expected to take in any godchildren should their parents die.

In this period babies were swaddled, that is, tightly bound in a way that prevented much movement. This led to them being very inactive and when added to the fact these were often only changed once a day, often smelly. For peasants swaddling might have been a relief, as work had to continue around them, but this was hardly conducive to outpourings of maternal love. For the more well off families, swaddling had its uses, but the need to 'hang' children by the swaddling bands while work was completed was not necessary in this class.

Babies were breast fed by their mothers in the lower social classes, and by 'wet nurses' in higher status families. For those in absolute poverty, or where there were no chances of breast milk, a baby might be fed 'pap', bread soaked in milk or water. In these cases, the babies did not receive the necessary nourishment, and they often suffered.

Mortality rates for children of this period were probably high but accurate assessments are difficult to achieve, as records for deaths were not

required for most states in this period. Until the nineteenth century, all records were held by parishes rather than governments across Europe, and many have been lost, especially for the earlier periods. In many countries, it was not required for parishes to keep these records until the sixteenth century. Other demographic studies for death rates in our period have relied on church records, especially those of monastic estates, and these do not reflect family life. Those studies that can reveal death rates are mostly based on very small samples, and can only be indicative of national or international trends. What can be seen in these is that young children were very vulnerable to disease and accidents, and parents often lost a proportion of their offspring before adulthood.

Adolescence/puberty

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the teachings of the church did involve advice on childrearing. Any death of a child was taken seriously, and coroners were often involved to investigate the incidents. These records can be used to show that the location of these accidents indicate a division of the sexes even in childhood. Accidents involving girls were more likely to occur in the home, while those of boys happened outside of this domestic sphere.

This body of evidence suggests that as children moved into adolescence, that is, from the age of seven, their roles followed distinct gender patterns. The other difference at this age was the status of their parents. For peasant children they may have been forced to work from an earlier age. If their lives were primarily agricultural, then young boys would be used to scatter seed, scare off crows and mind livestock. These activities can be seen demonstrated in the margins of many of the Books of Hours produced in this period. The roles of girls were more domestic, and included assisting with cooking, preparing food, minding younger children and milking livestock. From the age of seven, they may also be moved into 'service' in the households of those in the higher levels of society, although this was more likely at the age of puberty.

Adolescence was also the time in which some children received the benefit of patronage, where patrons could sponsor boys into schools to be of benefit in their own households at a later date.



Figure 6.1

Peasant girl working in the field with her mother, late fourteenth century (Tacuinum Sanitatis)

Source: © PRISMA ARCHIVO/Alamy Stock Photo

Age of Reason

When children reached the age of seven they were deemed to have reached the age of reason, and it was at this point that they received their first communion or confirmation into the Church. This ceremony marked them as adults in a spiritual sense. This was also the age at which they were deemed to understand good versus evil in a criminal cases.

By this age, both boys and girls were expected to know certain elements

of the religious ceremonies that they encountered throughout the year. Each was meant to be able to recite the Lord's Prayer, the Hail Mary and the Creed, the minimum requirements for lay Christians at this time.

Lord's Prayer – This was meant to be said in Latin for most of our period – as the *Pater Noster*. This was based on the teachings of Jesus (Matthew 6: 9–13)

O our father which arte in heven, halowed be thy name; let thy kingdom come; thy wyll be fulfilled as well in erth as hit ys in heven; geve vs this daye our daily breade; and forgeve vs our treaspases, even as we forgeve them which treaspas vs; leede vs not into temptacion, but delyvre vs ffrom yvell. For thyne is the kingdom and the power, and the glorye for ever. Amen.	Pater noster, qui es in caelis, sanctificetur nomen tuum. Adveniat regnum tuum. Fiat voluntas tua, sicut in caelo et in terra. Panem nostrum quotidianum da nobis hodie, et dimitte nobis debita nostra sicut et nos dimittimus debitoribus nostris. Et ne nos inducas in tentationem, sed libera nos a malo. Amen.
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Hail Mary – a prayer for the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, beginning with part of Luke 1: 28

Hail Mary, full of grace, Our Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death, Amen.

The Creed – originated at the Council of Nicaea, 325 AD. This was a general profession of faith and known as the Nicene Creed (and is still used today in various forms).

I believe in God, the Father Almighty Creator of Heaven and earth; and in Jesus Christ His Son Our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered and died under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into Hell the third Day He rose again from the Dead; He ascended into Heaven and sitteth at the right hand of God, the Father Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Catholic Church, the communion of the saints, the forgiveness of sins, the

resurrection of the body and life everlasting. Amen.

Coming of age/puberty

Coming of age was seen in many different spheres to be the age of puberty, not the physical onset of puberty itself. But this was not as clear a demarcation as might be expected. While in many ways twelve for girls and fourteen for boys was seen as adulthood, few marriages took place at this age, and if they did consummation was often delayed until sixteen, especially for girls. Likewise, the age of inheritance was not puberty but twenty-one, although girls could inherit at sixteen if they were married. This indicates the variety and contradictions of this point in medieval life. Whether someone came of age or not was always related to some type of asset or inheritance, and therefore was only significant for these sections of society.

Puberty was also the time in which boys and girls could be indentured into apprenticeships. These were not always with their parents – indeed this was relatively uncommon. Apprenticeships involved the young person living within the household of their master or mistress, and often lasted for seven to ten years. Apprenticeships were common in both rural and urban centres; they covered a wide range of skills and were sharply divided by gender. While girls had fewer opportunities than boys, they could be indentured to a seamstress or become silk workers. In urban areas apprenticeships were likely to involve guilds, which had very strict rules governing the roles of both apprentice and master. Both had the right of appeal for bad conduct within the guild, and records survive that demonstrate these events. Apprenticeships for boys normally began at fourteen at the beginning of our period, moving up to fifteen, sixteen or even eighteen at a later date. The later entry could be a reflection of the need for apprentices to have achieved a reasonable education before entering a profession by the end of the fifteenth century.

Coming of age was also related to inheritance, and therefore was only significant to the sections of society who had assets. This was of special importance in regard to rulers. The rule of a minor – as king, prince or duke – was seen as a problematic period, but the date at which it moved from a minority to full rule was not constant. Often this date was dependant on outside factors, especially the competence or otherwise of the regents or council that ruled on the young ruler's behalf. In England in the fourteenth century, Edward III (1312–77) declared his own fitness to rule at seventeen, whereas his grandson Richard II (1367–1400) did the same at twenty-two.

Charles VI of France (1368–80) ascended the throne at the age of eleven, and although in France the age of majority was set at fourteen, in this case his regents did not allow him to rule independently until he was twenty-one. In Scotland in the fifteenth century there was a succession of minor kings, but James IV (1473–1513) came to the throne at the age of fifteen and immediately ruled in his own right.

For those wishing to come into the inheritance of their fathers through the courts, witnesses were called to corroborate their age; this was known as proof of age. Many of these witness statements have survived; they were offered by local men of substance – freeholders of land. These statements were often formulaic, as they required some kind of collaborative evidence to link the birth, or more likely christening, of the youth to an event in the witness's life. The necessity for these links has led to this evidence often being seen as inaccurate, and examples of events used for proof of age were a christening being witnessed at the same time as a burial of a family member or friend. The accuracy of these statements cannot be verified here, but what is important is that there were efforts made by church courts to verify the age or even identification of an heir before they could come into this inheritance.

‘Coming of age’ was therefore a variable event dependant on circumstances. Unlike today where these events are prescribed in law, in the medieval period there was greater room for variation, whether they were under the control of the Church or civic courts.

Education

From the early days of Christianity in Western Europe, monasteries and churches provided some type of elementary schooling, mostly for boys. It is not clear whether these schools were only for those intended for the church, but by the later period these schools did include all local boys irrespective of their calling in life. Convents often offered a similar opportunity for girls to learn, again widening over time to include those not intending to become nuns. Those children not intending to join the church paid a fee to attend these schools to learn Latin grammar, and from 1387 Grammar Schools were recognised in England.

For those living away from monasteries and cathedrals, education was often undertaken by parish priests or those attached to chantries. By the late medieval period this type of schooling was widespread and available to many in the lower level of society. Literacy levels cannot be accurately ascertained, but it is likely they were higher than we once thought, due to

the practice of local teaching even at a basic level in the parishes.

Additionally a distinction must be made between the ability to read and that of writing. Writing involved many more skills, including mixing ink and making vellum (paper only arrived in large quantities in the fifteenth century) and quills. Thus documents that have ‘marks’ for a witness instead of a name might not necessarily mean the person was illiterate. For many people a ‘scrivener’ was used when documents were needed, these were specialists in making documents, and were trained specifically in this field. Scriveners were a recognised trade in our period. The rates of literacy often do not take into account this difference between reading and writing and is something to be aware of when looking at original documents, as a mark does not always denote someone who could not read the document, but only their inability to write their name.

Latin and Greek

The study of Latin and Greek, both Classical languages, was very different in our period. Latin was the language of the medieval church; it formed the basis of much education in the West, and its use and study allowed communication across Europe. Vernacular languages were increasingly used and taught across Europe in the later medieval period, appearing in literature and official documents.

Greek was the language of the Byzantine Empire in the East; at the end of the fourteenth century, as this empire waned, many Greek scholars left and moved into Italy. They brought with them many ancient texts and books and this is credited with the genesis of the Renaissance – the rebirth of Classical learning. Greek textbooks in medicine, theology and science had been available before this, but from the end of the fourteenth century their availability expanded, and teaching of Greek spread. This led to Greek grammar books being produced to standardise the language in the same way as Latin.

Greek was taught in universities, which had started to develop across Europe by 1300; the first university was Bologna in c.1088, and by 1300 there were many across Europe (see below).

Universities

The idea of a university was not new by 1300; indeed, by this date there were already a number of these institutions across Europe. Universities emerged to further the education offered at church and cathedral schools,

and often these institutions sponsored their students at university. Education was not free, students were expected to pay their tutors, and also for their bread and board. Paris and Oxford started as a non-unified collection of colleges, each of which offered both accommodation and tutoring. Universities were not restricted to students of the home country, and it was common to find students of many different nationalities at these medieval institutions.

The curriculum of a medieval university started with the study of the seven liberal arts: grammar, rhetoric, logic, geometry, arithmetic, astronomy and music. Students then went on to specialise in medicine, law or theology.

Students started university study from the minimum age of fourteen (the age of adulthood), and while many universities made this a stipulation, some set the age higher; New College, Oxford, for example, accepted students at the age of seventeen years (mostly from their feeder school Winchester College). There was no standard level of education for those arriving at university, and there were some examples in the University of Perpignan, France in the late fourteenth century, that suggest that some arriving for study could not write. As we have seen before, this probably meant the lack of skill in this particular area not an inability to read. This situation was also found in the University of Heidelberg in 1466. There was also no standard length of a university degree course in this period, and no set course content, and very often tutors could attract students from across Europe by reputation alone.

It should be noted that many students attended university but did not achieve a degree; indeed, it appears that this element was not very important. What was needed was evidence of university level study for a period of time not the attainment of a degree, which was hard to achieve. Some students left due to poverty and inability to pay fees, even though most universities did offer some kind of poor relief, and often offered some education to poor scholars. All universities were male institutions; women did not attend university until the seventeenth century, and even then in small numbers.

<i>University</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Detail</i>
Bologna	Italy	c.1088	Specialist in law
Paris	France	1150–70	Collegiate
Oxford	England	c. 1167–90	Collegiate
Naples	Italy	1224	First founded by Emperor Frederick

Toulouse	France	1229	II First founded by pope, Gregory IX
Cambridge	England	1209	Collegiate
Montpelier	France	1220 (maybe earlier)	Founded by Pope Honorius III
Salamanca	Spain	1218	Founded King Alfonso IX of Castile and Leon
Padua	Italy	1222	Specialist in law
Rome	Italy	1303	Founded by Pope Boniface VIII
Florence	Italy	1321	Founded by Florentine Republic
Prague	Czech Republic	1348	Founded Emperor Charles IV
Vienna	Austria	1365	Founded by Duke Rudolph IV
Heidelberg	Germany	1386	Founded by Holy Roman Emperor
Aix en Provence	France	1409	Founded by Louis II Duke of Anjou
Leipzig	Germany	1409	Founded by Frederick I, Elector of Saxony
St Andrews	Scotland	1411	Founded by Pope Benedict XIII (Avignon pope)
Louvain	Belgium	1425	Founded by Pope Martin V
Glasgow	Scotland	1451	Founded by Pope Nicholas V
Freiberg	Germany	1457	Founded by Hapsburg Dynasty
Tubingen	Germany	1477	Count Eberhard of Wurttemberg
Aberdeen	Scotland	1495	Founded by Bishop William Elphinstone as King's College, Aberdeen

University and education generally could offer opportunities for men to

elevate their social status, and therefore were not available for women. Normally men would need a patron to assist in a placement in a university and school and then later into a noble or religious household. Some men were known to achieve great power through this route, for example, Cardinal Thomas Wolsey (c.1473–1530), son of a butcher in Ipswich, rose through the Church to become archbishop of York and Lord Chancellor of England. At the same time Eustace Chapuys (c.1490–1556), son of a lawyer, became a diplomat and Imperial Ambassador to England on behalf of Charles V of Spain. Despite his relatively lowly background, he became close to many of the important figures of the period, especially in England. One of the great humanist scholars of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century, Erasmus (Desiderius Erasmus Roterodamus) was born out of wedlock in c. 1466, the son of a Catholic priest. By his death in 1536, his education had enabled him to have a career as a scholar with a Europe-wide reputation. Education was one of the few routes available to men to rise above their humble origins.

Orphans/paupers

The fate of orphans was directly related to status in life. For those of humble origins, being made an orphan by death or desertion could mean being condemned to a life of poverty as a pauper. For those with inherited wealth, other parties would intervene to look after children, sometimes with financial plans of their own. These children will be examined in light of their social status, but it must be noted that the designation of orphan often only related to the death of a father, the mother not always having a legal right to these children, at this point known as wards.

Paupers

The Church preached a concern for orphan paupers in light of the Acts of Mercy seen in [Chapter 2](#). Again there are few surviving records that can help to see what both civic and Church authorities did to assist these children, but patchy evidence can reveal their experiences across Europe.

Foundling homes (for abandoned babies) were set up for children whose parents had died or could not afford to raise them, as well as illegitimate children. Given the special needs of young babies, these were often placed in other homes to provide the necessary milk. For those children left in foundling homes without this option the mortality rates were very high.

Pauper children were often adopted out into other families, where their

future was dependant on their attitude. Some became indentured servants once they were old enough, while others could be considered the same as natural born children. Given the high death rate for both parents and children, these adoptive relationships were common.

Some pauper children did become street children, beggars or thieves, especially in urban centres. If these children were caught breaking the law, their age determined their punishment. How to treat children guilty of crimes was not a clear procedure in our period, and while they were deemed to be able to understand a crime as an adolescent, at the same time they were seen as defective in understanding due to their age. Pardons were common for children who were accused of crimes, although these had to be sought by their families. It was not uncommon for children, even very young ones, to be jailed until a judge arrived to hear a case.

By the sixteenth century it was generally seen that a child under the age of seven (therefore the Age of Reason) could not be found guilty of a crime. For an adolescent there was a presumption of the same, although individual cases could overturn this; but by the age of puberty these young people were tried as adults.

Urban authorities were only concerned in a legal capacity with those children who had inheritances. For those orphaned at the lowest level of society, if they were lucky their wider family cared for them; otherwise it fell to the charity of the Church.

Middling and elite children

The process for dealing with children who had assets was generally the same in our period regardless of their social class. Civic authorities or the courts of kings dealt with these children and took a close interest in their well-being, placement and assets. These processes produced considerable numbers of documents that can be used to study individual cases as well as general trends.

In these cases the child might be assigned to another guardian, even if the mother was still alive, and this guardian also had control of their assets. As a guardian, they were meant to look after these assets and pass them back with some profit once the child came of age. This was not always successful, and kings did take an interest in these cases. The assets of a child were well known from wills, inventories and, in the case of titles, their lands and estates. These children were called wards of court, and often this wardship was sold, with the guardian hoping for a later marriage between this ward and his own heirs, to bring these assets formally within

their own family. But often placement was preferred within the child's extended family. The marriage of a ward when underage also came to the attention of these courts or civic authorities, who could block them if they were not deemed to be in the best interest of the child. If an orphan in these cases died, these courts/authorities would decide on the estate.

A mother might be ignored as a guardian of her children on the death of their father, although this was not generally the case, especially when a child was very young. In some high profile cases with large inheritances the mother might be challenged. Some valuable wardships were fiercely fought over, not in view of the interest of the child, but the assets that this wardship represented, even if these were only to be held temporarily. Even in these cases, the wider family would be expected to ensure the well-being of the child and their inheritance.

Summary

The experience of children and education in this period was greatly dependant on relative status in life, but this did not always guarantee good health or a long life. Over our period there was a marked increase in schooling for many levels of society; opportunities were beginning to open for capable men to use this to better their prospects in life. Women, while still predominantly in the domestic domain, were often given access as children to some type of rudimentary education at all levels of society.

There is still much work to be done in this area, where evidence can be used from both historical and archaeological sources to advance our understanding of the lives of medieval children.

Further reading

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Parliaments

The idea of a parliament is a common one today, with variations in name across countries and continents but the same basic purpose, to provide a voice for the people and produce legislation in line with their wishes. Just as the term parliament today applies to organisations with varying degrees of democracy and representation across the globe, dependent on local custom and values, the same must be seen in the medieval period. While the term is the same, the idea of parliament in this period was different.

In our period there were gatherings of senior people in each country that evolved into a parliament with a legislative function. These were not representative of ‘the people’ in the same way as today, and the degree to which they represented any people of their country was vastly different. The ideas of universal suffrage, democracy and equal rights were completely alien in this period, and this difference needs to be understood.

The first gathering that can be identified as having the rituals and ceremonies denoting a parliament was in the kingdom of Leon and Castile in 1188. Thus, by 1300 these institutions were not new, but our period is significant in their development. The idea of a ruler needing to consult with their leading nobility for ‘counsel’ was not new even by 1000, and by 1300 many countries formalised these into meetings, and certain people within a realm felt an entitlement to attend. Also by this date many countries had also already held formative parliaments that had expanded, in the fourteenth century, from just a ruler needing counsel from his nobles to the idea of the consultation by the ‘Three Estates’.

Higher Clergy (Archbishops, bishops and some abbots/ priors	Nobility	Leading gentry, knights in counties or smaller administrative areas	<i>Leading burghers or merchants from urban areas</i>
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The concept of the Fourth Estate, which comprised those from urban areas, was increasingly common in our period. In some countries such as France, these were considered part of the Third Estate and there was no distinction made. But others, such as Sweden, called these to their parliaments as an extra layer of representation. While the inclusion of the Third Estate as members of these parliaments might suggest the genesis of a democratic system, this is not accurate and it would be wrong to see any type of development of democracy in these early gatherings in line with parliaments today. It would also be wrong to see the knights and burgesses of these institutions as fledgling democrats, part of the process of democratisation and eventual universal suffrage. They were called to parliament by their monarch to fulfil their duty and represent their community, and this was considered an honour. They were all men, and they saw this as an extension of their role in society, not as part of a movement towards representation by a larger section of society, a concept most probably completely alien to them.

Poland was unusual in our period as its parliamentary institution reduced the power of their monarch in the early sixteenth century; this was in the interests of the nobility of the kingdom, not a democratic triumph. In all other countries, parliaments were tools of the monarch, who had the power to summon and dismiss, as well as to ignore any requests. Few countries called parliaments on a regular basis, and they were generally summoned to deal with specific situations or a need for taxation. In times of conflict or war they were likely to be called more often, not only to deal with the need to safeguard the kingdom but also to raise taxes for either attack or defence.

Over our period the role of parliaments increased at varying rates, but the notion that these bodies could sanction taxation became a common feature. Taxation in this period was not the regular occurrence it is today. The population were required to pay church taxes, or tithes, based on their income, but otherwise a style of personal taxation based on income was not known. There were other taxes, on wool production, imports and exports, for example, but taxation of individuals based on their wealth, not earnings, was only allowed when a parliament gave permission. These taxes were called in fractions of wealth: for example, a tenth or fifteenth.

One area of little discussion or analysis in regard to medieval parliaments is the role and even attendance of the relevant kings. Monarchs were not involved in any discussions of the parliaments, and in some cases they did not attend. If they did attend, it would often only be for the plenary sessions of all Three Estates at the beginning or end of the gathering. The nature of the information flow between the parliament and king is not always clear, but it might have occurred through proxies or agents. All parliaments were called in the name of the monarch, but interaction of most attendees with the king would have been minimal, especially for those in the Third Estate.

The Estates

Third Estate (and Fourth Estate)

The members of these groups were 'elected' by their communities to attend parliament after a royal summons. It appears that election to this had a presumption of attendance at a single session, not a series. The election was only within a small number of people, in either a town (Fourth Estate) or county (Third Estate). Those chosen to go would be expected to pay for their own travel and lodgings, as well as for their servants, as they would not travel alone. While there was the example of the 1481–82 Parliament (*Cortes*) in Portugal, in which the king, John II (1455–95), subsidised the travel of some of the burgesses of poor towns, it placed them under obligation to the king and was therefore generally avoided.

In many ways the Third and Fourth Estates were at a disadvantage in these sessions, as they were not often in the position to have personal relationships with a king or ruler, unlike those in the First and Second Estates, who may have been blood relatives. This enabled the latter to have easier access to monarchs, based on their familial and social status, and it placed members of the Third and Fourth Estate at a disadvantage in these gatherings.

These two Estates, while required to sanction taxation and agree to legislation, were very much the lower division of the hierarchy of parliaments. There are examples of how the Third and Fourth Estates were exercising greater influence in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in some countries such as England, but as this was an era when monarchs ruled and reigned, their influence was always limited in ways not seen today.

Second Estate

This was composed of the nobility of each country (See [Chapter 4](#)). These nobles had the traditional role from a much earlier period of offering counsel to the king, and this was seen as their right and a closely guarded privilege. By our period, this right to be summoned to a parliament was seen as an inheritable attribute that passed through families.

The nobles who attended were ranked in a strict hierarchy; in France this was based on the age of the noble title, whereas in England it was the rank that was more important. Many nobles had access to the monarch beyond parliament and may have been relatives and members of the Blood Royal as well.

If a parliament was spilt into different chambers after a plenary session, the Second Estate typically met with the First Estate. Their role over time changed dependent on location. Those in Poland in the early sixteenth century rendered their king almost powerless, while in others they negated the Third Estate to a large degree.

Many also attended the more private and intimate King's Council (or Privy Council in England), where many more decisions were made without the need to call a parliament, and they also offered counsel to a king in this context. Many parliaments developed from these Councils, but did not replace them completely.

First Estate

All European parliaments included religious leaders in their bodies, but these were only the higher levels of the clergy, namely archbishops, bishops and abbot or priors of major monasteries. In England, those abbots and priors summoned to parliament can be clearly identified in funerary monuments, as they are depicted with their mitre, an indication of this role and privilege. An example is the tomb of Abbot Thomas Seabroke (Abbot, 1450–57) in St Peter's Abbey, now Gloucester Cathedral. This was also the case in Scotland for fifteen senior abbots, including those of Iona and Scone. Not all of those entitled to attend were summoned for each parliament, and generally bishops were represented more widely than their monastic counterparts.

In the English example, of the twenty-seven abbots/priors who were summoned to parliament, many habitually tried to avoid attending even after fines were applied, or they sent proxies or deputies. This was often explained by the cost of attending parliaments and the pressure this placed upon their house. Others were absent on other duties as they were often

used as diplomats, especially to the papal curia. Abbots and priors were not always living the enclosed lives that might be suggested by their status as monks.

These archbishops, bishops and abbots/priors were ranked into a hierarchy that determined their seating position, and this position was also applied outside of parliament as well. Bishops were granted the same privileges as earls in their assemblies, reflecting their relative rank.

Some bishops also acted in a national capacity, serving as chancellors and treasurers for their monarchs. This was a common trait across Europe in our period, perhaps reflecting the level of their education. Many of these prelates and abbots/priors were also of noble birth, and therefore often shared the interests and concerns of the Second Estate, the nobility.

While the members of the First Estate were churchmen, this does not mean that parliaments concerned themselves very much with religious matters. These churchmen were at the forefront of legislation and the lives of people in their kingdoms beyond the teachings and strictures laid down by the Church. Rarely do we see these national parliaments deal with religious matters until the Reformation movements of the sixteenth century; yet these churchmen were influential on secular matters within these institutions in the preceding centuries.

National parliaments

England – Houses of Parliament – the Lords and the Commons

The term parliament was first used for these gatherings of the three estates in 1236. The expression ‘Three Estates’ was not used in the English context for their parliament; instead there were two houses: the lords of the nobility and the church formed the upper house, later the House of Lords, and the knights, landowners and sheriffs of the counties formed the lower house – the House of Commons. This latter house had begun after the assemblies of nobles had been extended, from 1212, to include men of local standing, often of gentry status. While parliaments were held for public counsel of the king, monarchs still had personal councils for more consultation and governance. These royal councils were more flexible and enabled favoured nobles to gain close access to the throne.

These gatherings were known as parliaments by 1300, and they became increasingly important in the fourteenth century, when the kings of England were not able to live, and especially wage war, from own resources. It was only with the consent of these two bodies that kings were able to raise

taxation on the kingdom from import/export taxes as well as on personal wealth. This was also a practical consideration as the members of the lower house were often those with the local knowledge needed to be able to collect these taxes as well.

But the role of the lower house did not mean that having the right of consent to taxation enabled them to affect policy in any way. In 1300 and the early years of the fourteenth century parliament could not oppose the king's requests for taxation, as they had a duty of consent; this was broken in 1376, when the Commons (lower house) refused a request for taxation on the grounds of mis-governance of the kingdom. This was a period when the king, Edward III (r. 1327–77), was elderly, and the war with France (The Hundred Years' War: (1337–1453)) was going very badly for England.

The legislative function of the English parliament required the assent of first the Lords and then the Commons, followed by personal assent of the king. The parliament was not seen as a restraint to the king; rather it amplified his power and prestige. While elections did take place in the counties for their representatives, as mentioned above, these were not part of a process of greater democratic progress, even when in the fifteenth century, the eligibility to elect was changed to those who received 40 shillings a year from freehold land. This represented a move to widen the electorate beyond just the gentry to include many more burgesses and merchants. However, these elections were not always called instead parliamentary representatives were often nominated and agreed by a small number of people within each county.

The First Estate was made up principally of higher clergy, often of noble birth. Not all monasteries were able to send their abbot or prior to parliament as this right was held by a small number of ancient and wealthy houses.

These two Houses (Lords and Commons) met at the beginning of a parliament in the same space for an address by the monarch, but then separated. In 1300 parliaments were held in various locations around the kingdom, but by 1550 these were all held in London, at the Palace of Westminster. This reflected the centralised nature of government in England where London housed the major administrative operations of the kingdom, such as the Chancery – treasury and the highest courts of justice.

It should also be noted that Calais sent representatives to the Commons from 1372 to 1558, as a borough of the kingdom of England.

The parliament of France in the period 1300 to 1550 reflected the changing nature of royal power in this country. In 1300 the king's control was limited to the centre of the country, with various powerful duchies surrounding the Ile de France area. Therefore, power was much decentralised. In contrast, by 1550 the French kings had brought these duchies under closer royal control and power was being centred on the king over a much wider area.

The French parliaments, in common with those across Europe, grew out of the traditional advice offered to the kings from their nobles and clergy. The Three Estates in France were referred to as the *Estates General*, and unlike other parliaments they had no tax raising powers. This started as the King's Court (*Curia Regis*), but by 1254 it had evolved into a separate body – a parliament, which sat in Paris from 1307. The King's Council did continue, and in the same way as in England it comprised a more intimate circle of nobles, clergy and family, as the Dauphin also attended. Their advice was more immediate than that offered by parliament, and from the late fifteenth century this Council was used to the detriment of parliament, which was virtually abandoned. As the Crown grew stronger, the style of kingship became more absolutist and the influence of parliament suffered in this respect.

The *Parlement* of Paris covered the whole kingdom and while more power was centred on the person of the king in the period, parliaments were in fact decentralised. In 1443 one was set up in Toulouse, and this was followed by regional parliaments being set up in other areas.

<i>City</i>	<i>Provence</i>	<i>Date</i>
Toulouse	Aquitaine	1443
Grenoble	Dauphine	1453
Bordeaux	Guyenne and Gascony	1462
Dijon	Burgundy	1472
Rouen	Normandy	1499/1515

While this may appear to dilute the power and prestige of the Paris parliament, in fact these regional institutions were placed in areas previously ruled by powerful dukes, and they represented the increasing influence of the French kings. Although referred to as parliaments, in fact they served more as judicial high courts, again reinforcing the idea of justice stemming from the monarch rather than a regional leader. They had no legislative function.

The Third Estate element of the French parliament consisted of elected

members from certain towns known as '*bonne villes*'. Not all towns had this honour.

Germany and the Holy Roman Empire – Imperial Diet – The Reichstag

The Holy Roman Empire consisted of many smaller territories, each of which had their own traditions and customs. The highest representative body was the Imperial Diet – the assembly of representatives from across the Empire, called the Reichstag in German.

Each smaller territory within the Empire had their own version of a representative body normally consisting of the Three Estates. If taxation was to be raised the agreement of all Three Estates was required in these regional bodies.

The Golden Bull of 1356 (See [Chapter 3](#)) not only defined which of the dukes and princes of the Empire could elect the Emperor but also saw the division between this group of seven and the other dukes and princes. When the Diet/Reichstag convened it included all dukes and princes (both electors and non-electors) as well as representatives from many of the Imperial and episcopal cities from across the Empire. Those who attended without being electors had many restrictions on their voting rights; for example, they were not entitled to vote on any territorial expansion.

Before 1489 the gathering of dukes and princes (not cities) was called the Hoftage, and was summoned on an irregular and informal basis. After 1489 this situation was formalised and subsequently called the Reichstag. This more formal gathering was divided into three colleges: the first college, composed of the seven electors, the second college, for all other princes and dukes of the territories in the Empire, both ecclesiastical (33) and secular (61) (as we have seen in the Chapter on Monarchy in the Holy Roman Empire princes and dukes were often clergy), and the third college, comprised the representatives of the imperial cities.

There was no formal location for these meetings, and they were held in many different cities across the Empire. The reforms of 1489 also made the Reichstag the single body for law making, the supreme court of the Empire and also the only body to authorise taxation. This formalisation was in response to the challenges of the Emperors and the increasing problems of holding the Empire together. Some historians call this a period of disintegration of the Empire, and the change in the Imperial Diet was designed to strengthen it and create cohesion across the diverse range of imperial lands and needs to be seen in this context.

The earliest parliament in Europe is often seen as the gathering held in Leon/Castile in 1188. The kingdom of Leon was incorporated into the kingdom of Castile in 1230. The Parliament was called the *Cortes* once all Three Estates were present, and the early parliaments of Leon included these members from the twelfth century.

The king summoned all members of the *Cortes*, and failure to attend this summons was seen as revolt. The king did not summon the same people for every *Cortes*, and membership was the king's prerogative. Those in the First Estate, the clergy, included archbishops, bishops and the leaders of the military orders (See [Chapter 2](#)) in the kingdom. The Second Estate, the nobility, saw it as their right to attend but had to wait for this summons. The Third Estate, comprised elected members (called *procuradores*), from the leading citizens of a number of towns, known as *concejos*. In addition, from the fourteenth century members of the Royal Council who were government officers were also entitled to attend these meetings.

The Castilian *Cortes* reached the summit of its influence and power at the end of the fourteenth century, and over the fifteenth century its influence declined for several reasons. The Third Estate gradually became smaller, with *Procuradores* from fewer towns being summoned. Between 1391 to 1449 all towns in Castile received a summons, but during the reign of Ferdinand and Isabella (r. 1474–1504) this was reduced to only eighteen towns, as representatives from a much enlarged kingdom. Towns at this point also fought each other for the right to attend, causing many issues, and the election process became more corrupt, with greater royal influence and interference. In the fifteenth century attendance by nobles and leading clergy also declined, and some historians see this as a deliberate policy to reduce the power and influence of the *Cortes*. Indeed, after 1527 the First and Second Estates withdrew from the *Cortes* completely.

In procedural terms the location and size of the *Cortes* was the choice of the king. The Three Estates discussed issues in separate rooms, and then presented petitions to the king. They did not stay in the *Cortes* for the decision, and this was passed to them in their own locality. If a king needed to raise a tax this was presented to the *Cortes* and often resulted in negotiation of terms between the Crown and Third Estate. Requests for legislation by the Third Estate were presented as petitions to the king, but whether or not they became law was not their decision. If the monarch

agreed to the petition, it then became law, without any further input from the Third Estate or *Cortes* itself.

The decline in the power of the *Cortes* over our period was in direct correlation to the increasing absolutism of the Castilian monarchs. Where other national parliaments grew in influence, in Castile the opposite occurred, with the reduction in personnel and the abandonment of this institution by the important groups of the nobility and clergy in the sixteenth century.

Aragon – Corts (or Cortes)

The origins of the Aragonese *Corts* can be found in the thirteenth century but unusually the clergy only attended from 1301.

This institution was divided into Four Estates, the clergy, the high nobility, the low nobility and citizens from significant towns (*Procuradores*). The separation of the nobility into two Estates is unusual, and these Estates had the right to attend the *Corts* just by proving their lineage; they did not need to be summoned by the king. It met by custom every two years in the presence of the king. These Four Estates were all required to agree to any decision, although they did meet to discuss issues separately. It was seen as more powerful than the parliament in Castile as it had its liberties confirmed before swearing allegiance at the beginning of a parliament. It also expected redress of any grievances or problems before it voted on issues, such as taxation. The numbers attending each *Corts* varied, and those of the higher nobility and the clergy were able to send substitutes or proxies in their place.

The *Corts* met in different locations across the kingdom, and there were repercussions for non-attendance, which was closely monitored. Proceedings were highly regulated, and while business was decided by majority vote, in fact many pieces of business were delegated to committees of four representatives from each Estate. The king was obliged to attend the session when each piece of business was proclaimed and participants were sworn in, so kings could not be unaware of decisions of this house. The king could not pass any law without the consent of the *Corts*.

Unusually, between each gathering of the *Corts* there were two members of each Estate who sat permanently and held a watching brief over public liberties and the spending of public money. This was a powerful body in the period, and during the reign of Ferdinand II (r. 1479–1516) he made it a deliberate policy to reduce their power. As this was the period of the dual

monarchy of Ferdinand and his wife Isabella I of Castile (r. 1474–1504) there was a direct comparison with the less powerful and much reduced *Cortes* of Castile, which may have served as a model for his changes.



Figure 7.1
Alfonso IV of Aragon at Catalan parliament in 1333

Source: © PRISMA ARCHIVO/Alamy Stock Photo

Portugal – Cortes

The Portuguese *Cortes* developed in a similar way and at the same time as the *Corts* in Aragon. The first recorded meeting was in 1211 and included only the First and Second Estates. After 1254 these were held regularly. Under King Denis (1261–1325) the Third Estate was included in these meetings.

The Portuguese *Cortes* were not called on a regular or fixed term basis, with twenty-seven being summoned in the fourteenth century and forty-seven in the fifteenth century, but only twelve in the sixteenth century.

The king summoned those eligible to parliament, and it was considered a great honour to be called. As was usual for medieval parliaments those summoned were not paid to attend, nor were their expenses funded. The example of John II offering to pay the expenses of poor boroughs in 1481 has been mentioned before. This model was rejected, as it was seen as placing these boroughs under an obligation to the king. In this parliament there were eighty boroughs represented, and this group had hierarchies similar to in the First and Second Estates.

The parliament met for a plenary session before splitting into the Three Estates for separate meetings. While this resulted in the kings receiving much advice they were not obliged to accept, and often did ignore this if their own aims were not aligned to the wishes of parliament.

Scotland – Parliament

The first recorded parliament in Scotland was in 1235. Early parliaments did not include all Three Estates, with the Third Estate being present only from 1296. The makeup of the Three Estates in Scotland followed the pattern of France and England: the clergy (thirteen bishops and sixteen abbots), the nobility and the Third Estate, composed of the commissioners from the Royal Burghs (towns). Early in the fourteenth century the Third Estate was extended to include knights and freeholders of land. The Scottish Parliament evolved out of the King's Council in the same way as the French *Parlement*.

The unicameral (meaning it met in a single chamber) Scottish Parliament met once a year on average. This institution had the power to grant taxation to the king, although this was rarely done in our period. It also had great influence over justice, legislation and foreign policy, especially warfare. From the 1450s it also approved legislation that had been drafted by the committee of the Lords of the Articles, who presented their conclusions for implementation. The Scottish parliament had varying degrees of power,

which fluctuated in relation to the relative power of the kings. In the fifteenth century, for example, a series of minor kings led to the increase in parliamentary power. As a body they were able to defy the wishes of a king, especially those represented by their royal minority councils.

Such was the power of this body that in 1560, the gathering called the Reformation Parliament asserted its right to decide the religion of the kingdom over any wishes of the monarch, the eighteen-year-old Mary, Queen of Scots (1542–87), who was living in France during her brief marriage to Francis II of France (1544–60). Thus parliament decreed Scotland to be a Protestant kingdom on a specific date: 17 August 1560.

Denmark – Danehof (Thing)

The Danish Parliament called the *Danehof* was a version of a *Thing* – an assembly of leading members of society. The development of the *Danehof* can be seen as part of the changes of Danish society from the eleventh century when Denmark was a decentralised country with a weak semi-elected king and a very small nobility. Valdemar II (1170–1241) developed a law code in 1241, which was followed in 1282 by the Danish version of the Magna Carta. This document emerged after a peaceful rebellion by some of the nobility against King Erik V (1249–86), which stopped the development of an increasingly strong king and limited royal autocracy. This can be seen as the beginning of parliamentary influence in Denmark.

The Danish ‘Magna Carta’ set out the limits of the power of a king and their place in the legal system, as well as decreeing that Parliaments, or *Danehofs*, should be called every year at Pentecost (fifty days after Easter and a significant Church festival). This document also set out the premise that kings could not act outside of the judicial system. Parliaments in Denmark were vital in the election of their kings who were proclaimed here. This was mostly in Nyborg Castle, in the presence of the Three Estates, although only a few of the Third Estate appear to have attended.

In the fourteenth century this development of the *Danehof* was halted, and the power of the *Rigsraadet* took over. This was the council of the kings, which extended in the late thirteenth century to include other magnates and bishops. This was a much smaller institution, of about twenty people, that effectively ruled the kingdom with or against the king, dependant on the situation. This council actually ruled the country during any interregnums (the time between two reigns when there was no king) and could call for a rebellion should a king act against them, as happened in 1523.

Denmark therefore effectively had no parliament from the 1440s, when this smaller council of magnates replaced the Danehof.

Sweden

Although Sweden was a member of the Kalmar Union with Denmark and Norway from 1397 to 1523, this was only in respect of their head of state, the king (or queen). All other functions of the three countries remained separate including their councils. The Swedish monarch summoned gatherings of nobles and leading clergy in the early part of our period, but greater power lay with the Council of the Nobles, especially in the Kalmar period as these joint monarchs rarely visited Sweden, therefore being unable to summon a parliament.

By 1300 this Swedish Council of the Realm, consisting only of members of the nobility, was a permanent institution, and it was due to their efforts that further integration into Danish affairs was resisted. These members also resented the Danish and German influence over the Swedish kingdom.

In 1523 Gustav Vasa I (1496–1560) was proclaimed an independent king of Sweden by this Council, breaking up the tripartite Kalmar Union. The Council of the Realm became the *Riksråd* and operated alongside the Diet, or gathering of the Four Estates from 1527, comprising the clergy, nobility, burghers and yeomen (freehold farmers). This Diet, or gathering, was called frequently in the early years of Gustav's reign to endorse his policies, but once he had established a strong monarchy the Diet was called less often. The Council, or *Riksråd*, was side-lined by parliament as part of this policy of a strong monarchy, which in later centuries led to a degree of absolutism on the part of Swedish kings.

The Swedish Parliament was a late foundation, and was powerful only for a short period between the breakaway of Sweden from the Kalmar Union and the strengthening monarchy of the later sixteenth century.

Norway

As a member of the Kalmar Union from 1397, Norway had no parliament of the Three Estates in the late medieval period. The *Riksrådet* emerged around 1300 from the king's Council and consisted of both nobility and clergy, but never evolved into a Parliament in the same way as other European countries. The *Riksrådet* was powerful and could even rule the country during an interregnum, for example between 1481 and 1483, although its power waned considerably in the sixteenth century, after

Sweden left the Kalmar Union. This body also adapted the laws of inheritance of the throne, gradually making Norway an elective rather than an inherited monarchy as was the case in earlier periods.

Norway had no parliament in the late medieval period, and it remained in the Kalmar Union with Denmark until 1536, when the Danes declared it to be a Danish province, not a separate kingdom. After this period, although this situation was never ratified by Norway, it still kept its own legal system and some institutions.

Poland – Sejm

Gatherings of the leading nobles and clergy of Poland are recorded from 1182 and called the *Wiec* (assembly). Over the next hundred years this group became more powerful, especially at a time of weaker monarchs, and they formed a Parliament, *Sejm*, consisting of the Three Estates. In the *Sejm* the leading clergy and nobility met in one chamber and the Third Estate, from both urban and rural areas, met in another.

From 1374 the *Sejm* gained the power of taxation in Poland and also took part in the election of their kings. This was always a powerful body, and in 1493 it split into two distinct houses: the Senate or Upper House consisting of the First and Second Estates and the House of Deputies or Lower House for the Third Estate. In the early sixteenth century the Senate managed to ensure supremacy over the House of Deputies, which by 1550 was composed of the minor nobility, not the merchants or burghers who made up the Third Estate elsewhere in Europe.

In 1505 the Senate took over legislative powers from the king, who became just one of the three ‘Deliberating Estates of the *Sejm*’. The power of the Polish nobility at the expense of the king was unique in this period.

Summary

It is clear that in the two centuries before 1300 there was a Europe-wide movement toward an extension of the traditional counselling gatherings of nobles and their leaders. This extension was the invitation – or more properly a summons – of the Third Estate, those not of noble birth, but men of standing in their wider communities. These gatherings created rules for their governance, and in most cases extended their remit for discussion and approval beyond advice into legislation for the kingdom and permission to tax the population.

After 1300 the development of these bodies was varied. Some, like that

of Poland, gradually reduced the power of their monarch, while others, such as that of Castile, allowed their kings (or queens) greater influence, enabling an absolutist monarchy to develop. Other parliaments did not develop from these earlier gatherings, and in Norway and Sweden this was probably due to their lower status in the tripartite Kalmar Union. This Union actually stifled parliamentary power and contained the one country to reject this parliamentary pattern completely in the fifteenth century, Denmark.

While the development of these bodies varied in our period, there was one constant factor, namely their kings (or queens), in whose name they were summoned. But while parliaments sat and offered advice or counsel to their monarch, these monarchs rarely attended sessions in person. Many parliaments fragmented into the Three Estates and then passed their decisions and arguments to the king in a different location. But a common feature was the absence of monarchs from all but the plenary session at the beginning or end of these gatherings.

Monarchs also had the power to call a parliament, they were never self-calling, and they also had the power to dissolve them. Kings or queens were the arbiters of who and how many people could attend. This template of a parliament being a council for the king was universal across our period and, unlike many other elements of medieval life, it had perhaps surprisingly little inheritance from Ancient Rome. Few medieval parliaments modelled themselves on the Ancient Roman format of Imperial government, and it was only Poland that actually called their Upper House a Senate, a term not used elsewhere.

Even where there were periods of absolutist monarchy, parliaments were still called, although their power was much reduced. In areas with strong central governments, such as England, parliaments thrived, especially once the control over the calling of taxation was their prerogative.

Finally I return to my earlier point. It is very important that the development of these bodies is not seen as part of the inevitability of democracy or progress towards universal suffrage that the term parliament implies in Europe today. This was not the function of a medieval parliament, and probably not what those of the period would want or expect. These institutions reflected society of their time and did not look forward to a period in which they had to share their power with any other social group.

Further reading

Genet, J-P., Fletcher, C.D. and Watts, J., eds, *Government and Political Life in England and France, c.1300–c.1500* (Cambridge, 2015)

Tanner, R., *The Late Medieval Scottish Parliament: Politics and the Three Estates, 1424–1488* (Edinburgh, 2001)

8

Justice

The study of medieval laws and legal systems is very old and wide-ranging. Legal historians cover all periods from the Roman Empire to the present time, with many specialising in the medieval period. Our period was significant in the development of legal codes and legislation enacted by parliaments. Scholars of legal history often specialise by country, as justice was very particular to a nation, while some specialise in certain elements of law, for example, wills. Their work is detailed and comprehensive, and many solicitors, barristers and judges also research and produce academic work in this area.

Thus, there is a large body of work concerning legal history of our period, and it is too vast to deal with in any detail here. Legal changes and developments by 1300 were part of a continuum that had started many centuries earlier and continued after 1550, especially in relation to the Reformation changes of the sixteenth century. But study of legal codes, decisions and the nature of law itself were also a feature of contemporary scholars. Law was neither static nor unregarded in this era, and as universities began to develop so did the study of law, its interpretations and awareness, through the study of canon and civil law across Europe.

Medieval legal codes were divided into three areas: civil, criminal and canon (ecclesiastical) law. In theory, canon law was the same across all of Western Europe, as it derived from the Church, which set its own laws, interpretations, courts and punishments. Within civil and criminal law, offences were dealt with along national lines; but it was possible to have

differences within a country, and judgments and sentences were to a degree the personal decisions of judges. Within each of these domains there was a hierarchy of courts, with cases being transferred to a higher one if needed, especially for appeals against a decision reached in a lower court. Much justice was dispensed locally in relation to local issues and personalities, and only serious cases were moved to higher courts.

1300 to 1550 was a period when legal records started to survive in greater numbers. In the past this increased volume has led to an interpretation that society was lawless in comparison to earlier times. But this volume needs to be seen in terms of survival patterns, rather than as a reflection of society. What is clear is that many people in the late medieval period showed an enthusiasm for using the law to redress wrongs, especially in land disputes. The large body of evidence that has survived from this enthusiasm, and its detail, can affect our understanding, especially in a negative sense. This period has been described as particularly litigious, but it does reflect the ease of access to the law and the courts for many sections of society.

All justice stemmed from the monarch, and in periods of weak monarchs (and minors) law and order could break down, especially into local feuds that were often settled by violence. Therefore, the application of justice also varied over time and place. Studying medieval legal history is now a specialist area, but one from which much social and political history can also be drawn. For example, the study of manorial courts records, the lowest level of justice in the system can illuminate how these small administrative units were organised and regulated.

Justice was not always a secular issue in the late medieval period, and the many ecclesiastical courts dealt with issues that today would not be their preserve and need to be considered as well. Canon or ecclesiastical courts heard cases of theft, murder and rape, and they were barred from passing any sentence that involved shedding blood. As such, they were often the court of choice for many people to avoid execution or maiming. For this purpose, many declared a minor post within the church, claiming what is known as the *Benefit of Clergy*, even if the post had been held many years earlier, hoping for a more lenient sentence. Not all cases remained in this jurisdiction, and they could be transferred to secular courts, especially when disputes were between clergy and secular people. The authority of church courts and appeals to the Papal Curia (Court) had been restricted in many countries by 1300, as part of the growing control by monarchs over the church in their respective countries. But church courts were still important, especially in relation to wills, deficiencies of the clergy and

moral crimes, such as adultery, bastardy and marriage issues, including broken betrothal promises.

The late medieval period was more brutal than society in Western Europe today, and execution and maiming for certain crimes, through the removal of hands, eyes or testicles, was not uncommon. But it was not lawless, and the voice of the ordinary people can be heard through the judgement and views of juries.

Many of the central tenets of medieval justice can be seen in the English Magna Carta, signed under duress by King John of England (r. 1199–1216) in 1215. The ideas in this document were not new at the time, nor were they special to England. The right to trial by peers was also seen in the Holy Roman Empire, France, Normandy and Italy in the preceding centuries. The right to justice within a legal code was considered important for all men, and could be seen as part of the feudal nature of society with the interdependence of men and their lord. The protection provided by the code of chivalry could also be seen in this respect, with its protection of the more vulnerable members of society and the dispensing of justice by lords (be they kings or knights). While not perfect by any means, justice was a concept that had common understanding, and through the court systems it was visible in all areas of medieval society.

The Magna Carta was an embodiment of the expectation of law based on legal codes of the past and a belief in the tradition of justice from the past. By 1300 legal decisions were increasingly being written down to avoid the need for the ‘remembering’ of past decisions. This ‘remembering’ was important in legal cases before this wholesale change to written records along with evidence from other sources including chronicles. Around 1300 collections of laws were being compiled in many European countries to avoid the need for ‘remembering’.

This chapter will look at the legal system and codes in place in Europe, crime and its punishment and the different court systems across Europe.

Legal codes

Roman law

The ancient Roman Empire was a significant influence on the legal systems of the late medieval period. The law codes of the Emperor Justinian (c.482–565 AD) were rediscovered in the late eleventh century, and they provided a framework for scholarly study and discussion among the fledgling universities in Europe, especially that of Bologna, in Italy. These

rediscovered texts were then discussed and analysed by commentators – known as the Glossators – whose comments and interpretations were equally studied. The input of the Glossators was followed by commentators (or Post-Glossators) who added their own legal knowledge to this corpus of knowledge. In this earlier part of our period, Roman Law was an intellectual exercise but was not a major influence on local laws, which were based on local custom. This study was justified by the fact that Justinian was seen as a *Holy* Roman Emperor.

Roman Law in the context of this period comprised three elements known as the Digest:

The Institutes – dating from c.300 AD, a collection of rules that became law;

The Digest – a collection of scholarly fragments relating to the Institutes;

The Code – a collection of Imperial Statutes (hence the terms codex and codification in relation to law).

Roman Law became the basis of canon law, a developing feature from the first millennium and based in Rome. The Roman Law studied from the eleventh century had common features, known as the '*ius commune*' – a set of legal principles later accepted across much of Europe.

The study of Roman Law led to its introduction into older law codes across Europe at different times in our period, but not England. It was seen as the sophisticated version of law, as it was written, and it may have been the encouragement for the increase in written evidence of our period. This code also enshrined the right of rule, as they had been 'given this power by the people' and was seen also as a gift from God. But this code also provided contradictory interpretations, for both the growing absolutism of some monarchs and the subjugation of a monarch to popular views.

The introduction of Roman Law across Europe was not a uniform process, and it occurred in different countries at different times. In all cases it was seen as a 're-adoption', even in areas where the ancient Roman Empire had not had authority such as Germany. In this case the Roman Law was incorporated into customary law. Each country adapted Roman Law to suit its own purposes, and the reference to the re-adoption should be seen as a modified Law not an exact copy. Because Roman Law was adopted in Spain, it was also used in the New World when this opened up in the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

The Humanist studies that developed during and after the Reformation studied Roman Law in its ancient context, and these studies were

responsible for the change in perception of this Law, from infallible to fallible.

Canon Law

Roman Law was one element of canon law adapted for use with the Roman Catholic Church. Canon Law comprised three elements:

- Holy Scripture
- Tradition and Customs
- Legislation from popes and the great Councils of the Church.

The first great legislative Council was that of Nicaea, in 325 AD held under the jurisdiction of Emperor Constantine, and formed the earliest canon law for the whole Church. The later Council of Trent convened in response to the Reformation in Europe, lasted from 1545 to 1563 and marked the division between the old and newer laws, as those enacted afterwards were called the ‘recent laws – ‘*ius novissimum*’.

Canon Law had its own lawyers, university scholars and courts. While it was similar to Roman Law in origin it was much more specific in practice.

<i>Church court hierarchy</i>	
Papal Curia	Highest court – appeal to justice from popes – held in Rome
Provincial Consistory Courts	Courts of archbishops as leaders of a Province
Diocesan Consistory Courts	Court of bishops (or Ordinaries) dealt with clerical misconduct (including murder and rape), spiritual discipline and heresy.
<i>(Court of Peculiars)</i>	<i>(For institutions outside of authority of a bishop)</i>
Court of the Archdeacon	Archdeacon within a diocese. Dealt with visitations of parishes and monastic houses, private matters, inheritance and sexual misconduct
Court of Rural Dean (Kirk Sessions in Scotland)	At parish level. Dealt with local cases and used as preparation for archdeacon courts

Canon Law was formed not to impose punishment but to incite remorse from the accused. As such, its punishments included fines, public confessions, pilgrimages and public flogging, or it could excommunicate the accused. Excommunication could mean only being excluded from church services (and their associated benefits to the soul) or a complete ostracism from the church and general society. In both cases removal from the benefits of church membership, its services and sacraments put a soul in great danger, especially if the person died and was denied last rites or even burial in consecrated ground. It also meant that they were social pariahs, and anyone who ignored these edicts and visited them could also face charges in a church court. Public confessions were designed to produce ridicule from the public, and were a penance for a sin committed. There was a degree of public humiliation in these events, which often included the wearing of specific clothing, such as sackcloth, being covering in ashes and parading in public to acknowledge their sin. Pilgrimages could also be imposed as punishment to local or international shrines.

English common law

England was the only country in Europe that did not adopt Roman Law; instead it maintained Common Law. Unlike Roman Law, Common Law did not have a collection of rules and statutes, rather it relied on decisions made in the past as precedence. These precedents were and are known from court records, which in the medieval period were sometimes found in chronicles. In contrast, Roman Law was codified, it had and has lists of legal codes in which all complaints brought to court have an appropriate punishment already set. Thus English Common Law was the unwritten customary law as found by courts.

England was aware of this difference in our period and viewed itself in this area as unique and superior. The English system had developed, in common with other countries across Europe, from its own legal codes from an earlier period – in England's case from the Anglo Saxon kings. This in turn was adapted by subsequent monarchs and administrative institutions in the centuries up to 1300.

English Common Law developed especially in the period 1150 to 1350, in response to the growth of royal taxation demands and the expansion of the influence of royal justice across the kingdom in the same period. Thus, judicial power was concentrated in the hands of kings, which was a problem when kings were children and during the many usurpations of the period. This also reflected the Anglo Saxon notion that law-making was

concentrated in the person of the king in his capacity as protector of the realm. Kings in our period did enact statutes in response to events, but these were reactive rather than proactive. The Statute of Mortmain of 1279, for example, was enacted to address the problem of the volume of land being passed into the 'dead hand' of the Church. This was a reaction to events that were already occurring, but it was not really effective, as within a short time land could be passed to the church in return for prayers – as long as the king received a fine.

Common Law was administered by royal judges who travelled in 'circuits' around the country sitting in provincial courts providing the same level of justice, which was presumed to apply equally across the country. Their interpretation of the law was seen as superior to any local customs that may have been used before.

Crime and punishment

Perception of the late Middle Ages might include the idea that it was lawless and brutal. It was a different age from today but certainly not lawless. The legal codes above provided a framework and a long history of expectations of justice. This was heavily mixed with a moral code that would be expected in a society so heavily influenced by the Church and Scriptures. Crimes were committed, of course, although their exact number can never be accurately ascertained, but some idea of how crime was perceived and punishment meted out can be deduced.

The crimes of the past were the same as today although the charges of treason and heresy, which might remain on some European statute books, have lost their impact. People were murdered and were murderers; equally, there were thieves, trespassers, assaults and rapes. The courts provided suitable methods for determining innocence or guilt, although the ordeal system (see below) does look very odd to modern eyes. Courts mostly provided juries with opportunities to look at evidence and hear protestations of innocence and accusations before coming to a verdict.

Public executions and maiming of convicts also need to be seen in the same way as public manifestations of justice and the protection of the social order. Public executions, the hanging of convicts' bodies in gibbets, and placing of heads and body parts on city gates were all done not to terrify the population but to reassure them that justice had been performed. This was a period with no police force, and society managed its felons in their own way. Likewise, there were few prisons, and those that existed did not have the capacity seen in houses of correction of later periods.

Therefore, if guilt was determined immediate retribution needed to be performed.

While there were many similarities in justice across Europe, there were some areas of difference. England, unlike other European countries such as France, Germany and Italy, did not have an inquisitorial system for gathering evidence; in England only a judge took evidence. The inquisitional system was also notorious for the use of torture, a feature also not generally seen in England, where the jury system was widespread.

Some statistical evidence has been gleaned from the court records of our period. This reveals that women committed only ten per cent of crimes, and also shows a decrease in the number of executions by the fifteenth century. Various theories have been put forward for this, including the general reduction in the population after the Black Death and different visitations of the plague, the increase of criminals being recruited to armies for the many conflicts taking place across Europe, the increase in number of prisons as an alternative to execution or a more literate and knowledgeable society. Probably it was a combination of all these factors.

Theft, trespass and damage

These lower level crimes were often dealt with in the lowest form of court based around the manor. For those who lost a case generally fines were expected to be paid to their successful accuser.

Infanticide

Some sections of medieval society, for example in Spain, preferred to have sons rather than daughters, especially since girls required a dowry before marriage or entry into a monastic house. Statistics reveal that eighty per cent of cases of infanticide related to girl children. The treatment of the people accused of this crime varied greatly, and most, though not all of the accused were women

The outcome of these cases varied from country to country, and also depended on whether it was heard in a civil or ecclesiastical court. Some people tried in civil cases were executed, while others, who had been tried in a Church court, were only required to perform repentance. It also appears that England accepted mitigating circumstances more readily than some other countries. This accords with findings that women were more likely to receive a pardon for their crimes than men.

Rape

Rape was seen as a serious crime, but convictions were hard to achieve, as proof was hard to gather if there were no witnesses. In court cases it appears that the accused tried tactics often seen in modern cases, such as defaming the reputation of the victim and accusing them of ‘Eve-like’ tendencies and temptations.

Rape was a capital crime carrying a death sentence, and the reluctance of juries of men (all juries were composed exclusively of men in this period) to convict on sparse evidence may account for the relatively low rate of convictions. Women who might harm a man during an attack were excused, although this was not normally accepted, as it subverted the ‘natural order’. Should a woman attack a man when not under duress she was often treated harshly, although petty violence to a wife was often overlooked.

Murder/manslaughter

The taking of a life was a serious crime in this period, and court cases reveal the circumstances of many of these cases. Many involved the use of blunt instruments as weapons, along with knives and swords. These prosecutions could be tried in both civil and church courts, where a death sentence could also be passed for such a crime. While execution for a convicted murderer was expected, some were offered pardons by kings – sometimes for a considerable fine. Murder was a principally male crime, especially among the perpetrators.

Debt

Debt was not only a crime but also a sin in our period. Recent research has highlighted the sophisticated credit systems of the period, and as a consequence of credit, there were those unable to pay their debts. Laws were passed dealing with the issue, and by the sixteenth century there were special prisons for debtors, where the inmates relied on their families for food and also to repay the debt and free them.

The focus on the importance of paying debts can be seen in many wills of the period, with instructions to their executors to pay any debts. This might have been a moral imperative that had ramifications for the fate of their soul, but it reveals the close link between the Church and everyday life of the period.

Punishment

Punishments meted out by courts varied according to the crime. Many lower level crimes were subject to fines. For those in the ecclesiastical courts the punishment might be public humiliation (see above) or fines, all of which aimed to exact remorse from the perpetrator. As there were few prisons, custodial sentences were not common. Those found guilty and imprisoned were at the mercy of charity from the public, as there were no funds for food or other essentials. Providing food for prisoners was one of the Temporal Acts of Mercy (See [Chapter 2](#)).

For those convicted of theft, the punishment varied according to the value of the item stolen. It was not uncommon for thieves to be hung, especially if violence was involved or if a property was 'breached'. For more petty theft a thief might be placed in public stocks, and the removal of the right hand was also noted in records for some cases. The variations between countries for the point at which petty theft became more serious was often linked to a monetary value.

For the most serious crimes capital punishment was commonly exacted. The method of execution depended on the status of the convicted criminal. The lower ranks of society were hung, while nobles expected to be beheaded by a sword. For serious crimes, especially treason, versions of 'hung, drawn and quartered' were meted out. In its most extreme form, a person would be hung until almost dead, taken down; their stomach was opened and their entrails (and often genitals) were burnt in front of them before they were split by being tied to four horses. The different elements of this punishment could be used at different times. Hanging could be followed by the body being placed in a gibbet, a metal cage, allowing birds to eat the flesh. This also prevented a body from being buried in consecrated ground.

Death by fire was more common in Continental Europe than in England, except in the sixteenth century when it was used in the religious upheavals of the period. This was especially reserved for crimes of heresy. Those who were burnt were not always offered the kindness of strangulation before burning or having a bag of gunpowder tied to their bodies to allow a quicker death.

Burnings and other executions were always public spectacles, and they need to be understood as demonstrations of justice in action and efforts to reassure the population that they were being protected from wrongdoers. At times authorities were under pressure if courts were seen as too lenient.

Branding by hot irons was also a punishment for many crimes and, along with the removal of hands, ears or tongues, was still considered a somewhat humane punishment in comparison to capital punishment. These

mutilations were often imposed for theft across much of Europe.

There were national variations in punishment and its implementation.



Figure 8.1

Execution of Hugh Despenser, England, by being hung drawn and quartered (1326), From Froissart's Chronicle, fifteenth century

Source: © GL Archive/Alamy Stock Photo

Trial by ordeal

Trials by water or fire were forbidden for clergy by the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, but they continued to the sixteenth century in the secular justice system. Along with trial by combat, these were seen to provide evidence of God's judgement on the accused. Should the accused come through the ordeal in an agreed way, they would be seen to be innocent by virtue of a miracle from God.

Trials by water involved submerging the accused and if they survived submersion in open water or a barrel they were declared innocent. This trial was adapted during the witch-hunts of the sixteenth and seventeenth

century, so that the innocent sank and the guilty floated – an impossible trial to survive.

Trails by fire involved the accused either retrieving a stone from boiling water or walking over a length of hot coals. Innocence was determined if no injury was evident at the time or after three days if bandaged.

Trial by combat, as the title suggests, involved the accused fighting for their innocence where God was seen to assist if he was innocent. It was possible to nominate another to fight on your behalf with the same premise of divine intervention for the innocent.

These ordeals, which became much rarer over time in our period, could be used for both criminal and civil proceedings. In England, Henry III (r. 1216–72) outlawed ordeals in 1219, and examples in Continental Europe exist up to the sixteenth century, but were an increasingly rare occurrence.

European justice

Germany

The kingdom of Germany was never a single statutory unit, and each of the political units had their own legal customs. It was not until 1500 that Roman Law was introduced across these disparate states to provide unity called the ‘Reception of Roman Law’. The period of 1300 to 1500 saw law enforced by canon law and local custom. German lawyers attended universities across Europe to study canon law, and this permeated into many areas of civil law in the period up to 1500.

Italy

Italy was the one place in Europe where the ideas and implementation of Roman Law had continued uninterrupted since the fall of the ancient Roman Empire. Nevertheless, their laws in the period 1300–1500 were a combination of this code with local customs. Italy was also the place where the early law schools developed, for example, in Bologna.

Italy could be seen as the foundation for the dissemination of Roman and Canon Law in our period. These legal codes were a unifying feature of the Italian Peninsula, which at this point was a collection of different duchies, kingdoms and city-states.

France

France, like Germany, had a legal code that was heavily influenced by canon law, augmented by royal ordinances and statutes issued by the French *Parlement*. By 1300 the process of codifying (listing) all the regional customary laws had been achieved, and these were written as the ‘*coutumes*’. These regional lists were gradually phased out in deference to the ‘*coutumes of Paris*’ in the sixteenth century for most of France, and they became the fixed format for customary law.

In 1300 France was a divided nation, with some areas ruled by strong local dukes or held under foreign powers, such as England. By 1550 this situation had been changed to one of a powerful king covering most of what is now France. This process also involved a standardisation of laws and their implementation, a combination of canon law and Roman Law.

Spain

Aragon

In the thirteenth century King James I (1208–76) requested the *Cortes* (Parliament) to codify the laws of Aragon. The result was the *Codigo de Huesca* a compilation of the laws, or *fueros*, of Aragon. This was written in two books, one for the *Cortes* and the other, more expanded version for the legal profession. Roman Law was limited in Aragon in order to limit the power of the king. The *fueros* were a combination of local custom and canon law.

Castile

At the same time as James I of Aragon was directing the parliament to collate the laws of Aragon, the same exercise was being completed in Castile under the authority of Alfonso X (1221–84). This became the statutory code known as *Siete Partides*, which attempted to create a uniform body of laws for the kingdom, originally called the *Libri de las Leyes*.

The *Libri* was only enacted in 1378 in the reign of Alfonso XI (1311–50) after opposition from the nobility. This also attempted to unify the legal code of the kingdom and was compiled from Castilian customs, Roman Law, canon law and also some Islamic texts. This book was important, being disseminated across Europe, and it was translated into French and English.

Portugal

The medieval legal code of Portugal was similar to those in other parts of Europe, a combination of Roman Law and local custom. These were also codified, as Portuguese kings became more secure on their throne and the threat of war with other Iberian countries receded. These codifications were later than those of Aragon and Castile, dating to the fifteenth and sixteenth century. The *Codigo Afonsino* was compiled in the reign of Afonso V (1432–81) and ratified in 1448. The second code was the *Ordenacoes Manuelinas* of 1512 (also 1513), in which reform of the courts was undertaken, but in the context of the increasingly absolutist monarchy of Manuel I (1469–1521).

Scotland

The Scottish medieval legal system had adapted elements of different traditions, and early justice was based upon customs in common with other countries across Europe. In 1318 a code of law was enacted under Robert I, the Bruce (1274–1329), which reflected the military nature of the time. This earlier legal code included influences from the Anglo-Norman system of Common Law found in England as well as from other continental practices, but Roman Law itself was only included in the fifteenth century. Roman Law was used when there was no local custom or precedence to provide guidance. The Scottish verdict of ‘*not proven*’, was first recorded in 1728, although it claimed it was based on ancient custom but was not recorded in the medieval period.

Scottish courts were being developed in our period from local sheriff courts to the King’s Court, an offshoot of parliament, in the fifteenth century.

Denmark

The laws of medieval Denmark were divided into three geographical areas: Scania, Zealand and Jutland. These were all written down in the reign of Valdemar II (1170–1241), just before his death. One copy of these was written in runic. These laws were not changed or codified until 1683, in the reign of Christian V (1646–99).

Sweden

From c.1200, law codes were increasingly written down in Sweden,

gradually replacing the oral tradition. Many of these are extant only in versions from the late thirteenth century and they have their origin in customary law that varied from region to region. These codes were heavily influenced by Danish practice until the national, not regional law code introduced by Magnus II, Magnusson (1316–74) in 1350, against opposition from his nobles.

Poland

As in other countries, the legal codes in Poland were fashioned by a combination of custom and Roman Law. Some of these customs had been brought by settlers from Germany in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and their implementation was more fragmented than in other countries, as the nobility obtained charters of immunity from royal courts and were able to administer justice in their own lands. Towns then followed suit. This was part of the power of the *Sejm*, or Parliament, in Poland, which was able to remove the influence of the king from the legal system through these means in the early sixteenth century.

The codification of Polish Law did not take place until 1630.

Serbia

The law codes in Serbia were codified in 1349, under Stephan Dusan IV (1308–55). In this jurisdiction, the state was aligned to the Orthodox Church, rather than the Roman Catholic Church, and as such their legal code did not feature Roman Law, but was heavily influenced by the Byzantine Empire and its law codes. In this way, the death penalty was used in a much more restricted way; it was reserved for counterfeiters, highway robbers and murderers of monks, bishops and priests.

Summary

Different themes can be seen across Europe in respect of law codes in our period. From the thirteenth century local customs often transmitted orally and were increasingly being committed to parchment and therefore study. The adoption of these written laws and customs could be used as a unifying feature in some diverse countries and states, for example, France and Germany, which increasingly became nation states over this period, with their leaders, king or emperor, increasing their authority.

The influence of the legal legacy of the ancient Roman Empire can also

be seen to increase over time, from the intellectual assessment of ancient law codes in universities to the adoption of their templates, models and examples in many countries into the sixteenth century, with the notable exception of England. But local custom and precedence in this arena were always important, and the Roman Law adopted by each country was an adapted law that reflected these local customs and circumstances.

The increasingly codified nature of laws was adopted not without opposition and with varying results. In Portugal the law codes enabled increasingly absolutist monarchs to consolidate their position, as kings were generally the beneficiary of legal standardisation. This can also be seen in France in the later part of our period. This process was opposed in Poland, where eventually the king lost out to the influence of his nobility in the *Sejm*.

The common cultural inheritance of the Roman Empire, even in areas where the ancient Empire had not had any authority, can be seen as a unifying factor in this period in law terms. One of the important factors in this general adoption could be the influence of the Roman Catholic Church and its own legal systems, which were themselves deeply rooted in the ancient Roman law codes.

Further reading

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9

Chivalry

Chivalry in its purest sense was the code by which the secular aristocracy of the medieval period behaved. It was intrinsically linked to the knight on horseback, and indeed the name ‘chivalry’ is linked to the French ‘*chevalier*’, horseman in English. The word ‘knight’ is derived from the German for the same word, ‘*kneht*’. Chivalry was a code of conduct that developed in the period before 1300, by which date it was recognised across Europe and formed the basis for much behaviour, especially on the battlefield. It is important to understand the origins of chivalry before considering its impact and importance in our period, which was characterised by heraldry, orders of chivalry (both secular and military) and even chivalric courts.

Origins

Early in the eleventh century events across continental Europe made a change to the nature of warfare. This was a period when there were considerable number of battles and skirmishes, especially in northern France, and this constant fighting led to high mortality rate that was not sustainable. A code of conventions were agreed that enabled the fighting to continue but with a lower death rate, known as ‘proto chivalry’. This allowed warfare to continue with a system of ransom rather than death following defeat becoming an acceptable end to a skirmish. The ‘code’ was endorsed and encouraged by the Church, which recognised the dangers of the situation, and it was able to use this system to its own advantage at the

end of this century. In 1095 the pope called the First Crusade against the 'infidels' in the Holy Land, calling on these fighters to use their skills in defence of the Church in return for spiritual benefits. The developing chivalric code also encouraged the defence of the weaker members of society, that is, women and non-combatants, who were to be protected and excluded from the consequences of warfare as much as possible.

By 1100 these ideas and the influence of the Church meant that warfare could be less brutal in certain situations; and the traits of honour, prowess and courage for knights were later augmented by the values of courtesy, magnanimity, mercy and generosity (*largesse*), thus forming the basis of the Code of Chivalry. In practical terms, this meant that while previously the garrison and inhabitants of a besieged castle might have been murdered upon surrender, under the code of chivalry and with a demonstration of magnanimity, they would be allowed to surrender with honour and survive. This widespread code meant that those on the fringes of Europe who did not behave in this 'chivalric' manner were deemed as barbaric; and an example in this period was Scotland (not helped by the fact they did not fight as knights on horseback but on foot).

Chivalry can be linked to the idea of the social elite and the gentry, as to be a knight required considerable funds: it was necessary to buy and train two horses, as a spare was needed, to travel and fund an entourage. A travelling knight needed servants, and esquires for assistance in tournaments and on the battlefield. Knights also required time to train, and this was not possible if they were also needed to work on the land of a lord. All of this might suggest that only the elite could act as knights, but in the early period promising young men could be allowed this time off for training – an opportunity that was often lost in later periods when the social hierarchy was more rigidly applied. The chance to be a knight with the requisite skills transcended social class in this earlier period before 1300, and it also appealed to many younger sons, who could use the battlefield to win lands or the hand of an heiress. These younger sons often formed the entourage of a lord, acting as his military support in both battle and tournaments. The camaraderie of these early knights is an important feature that is generally lost by 1300, when more national interests took precedence, and the idea survived only in the 'honour' of their conduct.

Technical developments also helped the skills of knights. The introduction of the stirrup from eastern, Saracen, armies in the eighth century had enabled the skill levels of knights to develop, as control of a horse became much easier. In the eleventh century, saddles, weapons and tactics were developed to enable a more effective use of the lance, a benefit

in both battle and tournament.

Tournaments

The introduction of tournaments across Europe was an essential part of the training of knights, for both their skills and their tactics in battle. In the earlier period these tournaments were quite brutal, even after a series of rules were developed. These dangers did not diminish in later centuries, for example, King Henry II of France (r. 1154–59) was killed in a tournament in 1159 when a broken lance entered his visor.

While these gatherings developed the individual skills of knights, they also helped with tactics among groups of knights, as the ‘melee’ section involved groups of knights fighting each other. These could then be transferred easily to the battlefield. In the early twelfth century, it was possible for a knight to travel across Europe fighting in tournaments gaining both a fortune and reputation, and while tournaments were held in later centuries, these opportunities were much diminished. Tournaments became the arena in which the chivalric ideals and conventions developed to be subsequently adopted on the battlefield; for example, the ransom system, in which a defeated knight owed a ransom to his victor, applied equally in a tournament and the battlefield.



Figure 9.1

Jousting Knights with their heraldic emblems, MS Harley, British Library (fifteenth century)

Tournaments were not consistently popular, and different leaders banned them at various times. From 1300, the tournament developed into more of a spectacle than outright battle between knights and groups of knights, and by the sixteenth century they were very elaborate in their design and appearance with stage settings rather than the early emphasis on fighting and strength. By the end of the sixteenth century, this form of entertainment had lost its appeal, despite the increased dramatic and allegorical content. But the death of Henry II of France in 1559 and serious injury to Henry VIII of England in 1536, both while jousting, do illustrate that they were still shows of military skills and fighting even to their demise.

Admission to knighthood

Chivalry developed its own series of ceremonies and rites to augment the action on the battlefield or tournament. Once apprentice knights reached the required standard, a senior knight invested them with their sword and belt, and a king or prince could take this ceremony, though this was not necessary and some knights were invested by churchmen. This ritual was recorded from early in the eleventh century, and it was soon augmented by religious ceremonies as well. These included a procession of the newly invested knights to a church and then a vigil or ceremony, often with the sword placed on the altar followed by mass. The link with the Church was emphasised in the increased ideology of the knight as defender of Christendom after the calling of the First Crusade by Pope Urban II (1088–99) in 1095. The linking of the knight to the Church was an early feature of chivalry; and the development of the idea of the knight as defender of the faith, and therefore having a ‘blessing’ to kill the Church’s enemies – whether infidels or the ‘wrong type’ of Christians, known as heretics – was significant.

The knighthood ceremony was also seen as a coming of age ceremony for young men, and many were knighted on the eve of a battle. But it must be stressed that the sources often only describe the ceremonies for the sons of the elite, not those who won their spurs through deeds on the battlefield, a much simpler ceremony.

Literature

Chivalry, its development and popularity can be seen in the romance

literature across Europe from the eleventh century onwards; and the two developed in tandem. The romantic tales of knights and their ladies, of brave deeds and honour, were popular across national barriers. This literature has its roots in three major movements of the period, which became known as the *Matter of Rome*: medieval adaptations of the works of the Ancient Romans and Greeks, for example, Virgil; the *Matter of France*: concerning the deeds (both true and fanciful) of the Emperor Charlemagne (c.742/8–814), king of the Franks, who united most of Western Europe, and the *Matter of Britain*: concerning legends of ancient Britons, especially those of Arthur, King of the Britons.

The tales of Arthur, his Round Table and his knights, encapsulate the heroic nature of chivalry, and the story evolved from the version written in 1130s by Geoffrey of Monmouth, comprising part of his *The History of the Kings of Britain*. But the Arthur myth predates this particular account, and Geoffrey incorporated the story of Arthur, Merlin and Uther Pendragon and his eventual death in Avalon into his work. This story was then developed by Continental writers, who changed the very masculine British story to a more romantic one, with expanded roles for women and the addition of Sir Lancelot and his supposed adultery with Queen Guinevere. In c.1155 a Jersey poet named Wace also expanded Geoffrey's tale to include the introduction of the Round Table, and he moved the focus of Arthur's activity beyond England. The French author Chretien de Troyes (1130–91) then took the tales and developed them beyond King Arthur, focusing on his knights and also the legend of the Holy Grail. Thus Arthur's knights and deeds became a European, not necessarily English, phenomena, which continued into the following centuries with a later version by Sir Thomas Malory (1405–71), *The Morte d'Arthur*, in the fifteenth century. The code of chivalry and its development can be seen clearly in these stories, as the earlier depiction of Arthur by Geoffrey described this king as a fighter, whereas Malory's later focus was on Arthur as a leader of chivalry through his Knights of the Round Table.

In addition to romances, the many literary sources for chivalry in this period include manuals for chivalric knights, such as that of Geoffroi de Charny (1300–56), whose *Livre de Chevalerie* was written in c.1350. In this work he described the necessary qualities for a knight in a military context, focusing on honour, prowess and being prepared for war. He also made clear the responsibility of knights to show their chivalric qualities to others in the period, as well as their role as the secular arm of the Church, in line with the earlier ethos of the knight as a protector. This manual gives a very clear description of the knighting ceremony from this date, and of

the nature of the religious connections. This description was based on a 'coming of age' ceremony rather than the more impromptu battlefield ceremony, which was equally binding.

Other literary sources were the chronicles, which also extolled the values and code of chivalry through the deeds of knights. The chronicles of Jean Froissart (c.1337–1405) in the fourteenth century, which cover the early period of the Hundred Years' War (1337–1453) between France and England, are an example. These chronicles can be used by historians in a variety of ways, including providing contemporary depiction of knights, their deeds and reaction to events. Thus Froissart described actions of real knights, especially in tournaments across Europe, extolling their chivalric virtues, rather than focusing on a romantic, literary, hero.

Code of chivalry

The code of chivalry was not laid down in any legislative manner and was therefore a fluid description that encapsulated several principles. *The Song of Roland*, one of France's oldest literary works, described the actions of the Emperor Charlemagne, and within this it described the Emperor's code of chivalry, as seen below, although some authors limit this to the first seven attributes.

Chivalric Ideals in *The Song of Roland*

~~Fear God and maintain His Church~~

Serve your liege lord in valour and faith

Protect the weak and defenceless

Give assistance and support to widows and orphans

Refrain from giving offence

Live by honour and for glory

Scorn financial reward

Fight for the welfare of all

Obey those in authority

Guard the honour of fellow knights

Shun unfairness, meanness and deceit

Keep faith at all times

Speak the truth

Persist and complete any enterprise

Respect the honour of women

Never to refuse a challenge from an equal

Never to turn your back upon a foe

In the later period these were encapsulated in the following seven principles.

Prowess	Skill/ expertise
Largesesse	Generosity
Loyalty	Fidelity and commitment to your temporal lord and God
Truth	Honesty, integrity, keep to word
Honour	Pride of lineage and reputation; protection of ladies and others in society
Franchise	Open and honest bearing appropriate to status
Courtesy	Good manners for every situation

Orders of chivalry

In the fourteenth century, monarchs and dukes developed orders of chivalry with which to reward their knightly companions that were not based on rank but on the comradeship of men at arms. These orders did widen to include women in their own versions of these orders as well.

There were two distinct types of orders of chivalry: the military orders and secular orders. The military orders were a unique feature of medieval Europe, as the members, all male, were fighting monks, whose knights joined not only to dedicate their lives to the Church, but also to fight for its defence. The members of the secular chivalric orders mostly dedicated themselves to the leader of the order, be they kings, princes or dukes.

Military orders

There were fewer of these orders in comparison to the secular chivalric orders. The main ones were the Knights Templar and the Knights Hospitallers, both founded in response to events in the Holy Land around the time of the First Crusade (1096–99). There were a number of other military orders founded across Europe in the period after the call of the First Crusade, but many were short-lived or struggled to fund themselves or their members, for example, the Order of the Faith and Peace (1231–73) of southern France. Other smaller military orders do continue to this day, but in different guises; for example, the Order of St Lazarus founded in 1098 in a leper hospital in Jerusalem, and merged in the fifteenth century with the French Order of St Maurice, still maintains its focus on the sick and

vulnerable in France.

As the members of these military orders were fighting monks, who often had a reckless approach to fighting resulting in high death rates, recruitment was often a problem. The orders discussed below represent those that had a large impact on both Western Europe and the Crusades in the Holy Land. These orders illustrate the struggle for conversion of heathens in Eastern Europe and the fight against the Muslim threat in the Holy Land, the Iberian Peninsula and Eastern Europe.

Knights Templar (Poor Knights of Christ and of the Temple of Solomon)

This military Order was founded in 1119/20 to protect pilgrims travelling to the religiously significant sites in the Holy Land. The Order was originally given space in the Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem, hence their title – Templars – and this site became their headquarters.

This Order was granted special privileges by Pope Innocent II (1130–43), in 1139, and was placed under the pope's direct control. It quickly became very rich due to pious donations enabling it to have land holdings and castles in the Holy Land and Western Europe. The papal bull of 1139 also placed the knights in this Order outside of the normal national or feudal obligations of the period; their only loyalties were to the Order itself and the Church. This allegiance did lead them at times to making alliances or treaties that were of benefit to the Order but not, perhaps, to other Christian groups. As an international Order that by 1200 had houses across Europe, it had also developed a banking function, in which funds deposited in one house could be drawn at another. This spared many travellers/pilgrims from carrying any wealth that might attract attention of robbers.

But by 1300 the situation was difficult for the Order. The fall of Acre, the last foothold in the Holy Land, in 1291, had removed their primary crusading function, and therefore the focus turned to their financial activities, which were not always popular. The Templars' wealth, secrecy and prestige had created enemies, most notably Philip IV of France (1268–1314), who in the period of the Avignon papacy also had great influence over the popes. It was in this context that Philip was able to force the pope, Clement V (pope 1305–14) to arrest the knights, put them on trial and eventually dissolve the Order. The reasons for Philip's animosity to the Templars are much debated, and it is true that he owed them a considerable amount of money and they had resisted his attempts to make the kings of France hereditary masters of the Order. But whatever the reason, over a

five-year period, 1307–12, he systematically managed to destroy the Order. On Friday, 13 October 1307 the French king ordered all their goods and estates in France to be seized, and many knights were arrested (this is the source of the ‘unlucky’ Friday 13th). The Order was accused of many crimes and sins, and fifty-four knights were burnt at the stake in 1309; by 1312 the pope issued a bull – *Vox in excelso* – which marked their end. The Grand Master was burnt to death by the order of Philip in 1312 and, although the pope had meant their goods to go to the Hospitallers, the French king kept them in his possession.

The Order was also suppressed in other countries: in Aragon their goods went to the new Order of Montesa rather than the Hospitallers. In England the king held their assets for a considerable period, while in Portugal the king appropriated them for his new Order of the Knights of Christ. In Germany, the Templars joined with the Hospitallers; this was the only area where this earlier suggestion of a union by the pope actually happened. This proposed union, prompted by the fall of Acre, had been fiercely resisted by both Orders as a result of bitter rivalry for many years. In countries other than France, the Templars were not condemned as heretics, indeed in England they were all found innocent; but this did not save the Order, as the pope their ultimate leader made the decision to suppress them.

History has not forgotten the Templars, and they have been the focus of much interest and speculation since 1312. But their downfall was ultimately linked to the fall of the Holy Land in 1291, and it needs to be seen in this context. The fall of the Holy Land removed their *raison d’être*, their wealth was envied and their role outside of national loyalties left them at the mercy of the pope, who in this period was not entirely independent himself.

Knights Hospitallers (Knights of the Order of St John)

This military Order was founded in 1113, with the principal aim of providing a hospital for the pilgrims to the Holy Land. A hospital in this period was not entirely medical, as it also provided hostel facilities for travellers. This role for the Order was in addition to their military one, in conjunction with the Knights Templar, to protect the Holy Land during the early phases of the Crusades. Once Jerusalem was lost, in 1187, the Knights moved their base along with other organisations to Acre for the next hundred years. Once Acre itself was lost, along with the rest of the lands in the east, in 1291, the Knights moved their headquarters to Cyprus and then Rhodes.

By 1308 the Hospitallers were acting as the sovereigns of Rhodes, issuing their own coinage, and they used this base for over 200 years; while holding other land and assets in Western Europe as well. The rise of the power of the Ottoman Empire, from the beginning of the sixteenth century, meant that they lost their home in Rhodes in 1523; and after a period they were granted Malta by the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V (1500–58) in 1530, for an annual rent of a falcon (a Maltese falcon). Hence the flag of Malta today contains the cross of the Knights Hospitallers.

At the time of the suppression of the Knights Templar, in the early fourteenth century, the Hospitallers were not under the same threat. Their role across Europe was not financial, although they were wealthy, and the Order did not generate the kind of animosity the Templars did. Their original purpose to provide hospitals for pilgrims was replicated across Europe. The loss of the Holy Land should have applied equally to the Hospitallers as a military Order, but they escaped this censure due to their charitable works across Europe and their apparent humility, as they did not live in obvious opulence. Also their role on Rhodes was seen as defending the west against the Ottoman threat, and protecting shipping in this area. The Knights Hospitallers continue to this day, although they lost their base on Malta to Napoleon in 1798. They are now based in Rome, and they still provide hospital care.

Teutonic Knights (House of Hospitallers of Saint Mary of the Teutons in Jerusalem)

This was a German military Order, founded in 1189/90 in Acre (after the fall of Jerusalem), to care for the German knights in the area. In the same way as the Templars, this Order was placed under the authority of the pope.

From this early period these knights were granted land in both the Holy Land and Germany, and during the thirteenth century they moved their centre of operations away from the East. In 1211 the knights were invited by the Hungarian king, Andrew II (1177–1235), to assist his country in protecting his borders and to convert the heathens in the Transylvanian area. This did not last beyond 1225, but it did form the pattern of their later actions, as they later assisted the Polish duke, Conrad of Mazovia (c.1187–1247), against the pagan Prussians. In the ensuing decades, the Order gained control over the area of Prussia and brought in German peasants to replace the local population, many of whom were killed.

The Order set up its headquarters in Marienburg, where they built a large

castle, and after the absorption of the Knights of the Sword (see below) in 1237, they governed Prussia, Livonia, Estonia, eastern Pomerania and held other lands in central and southern Germany. They worked in league with the German merchants of the Hanseatic League in their efforts to establish trading bases in Lithuania, and tried to convert this area to Christianity.

But this large and powerful Order was challenged in the fourteenth century by Poland, who resented their control, and by people in Lithuania, who were being threatened by the Order despite their conversion to Christianity. By 1466 the Order had lost much of its territory to the Polish kings, leaving only Prussia held by the Order's Grand Master as a vassal of the Poles. The Order was suppressed in Prussia in 1525 due to the religious changes of the sixteenth century, and it changed to a secular duchy rather than a religious Order. The final lands held by the Order in other parts of Europe were gradually eroded, but the last, in Germany, were not lost until 1801. The Order was dissolved by Napoleon in 1809.

Knights of the Sword (Order of the Livonian Brothers of the Sword)

Of all the military orders, the Knights of the Sword were the only ones with no links to the Holy Land, and the Order was founded in 1202, after the loss of Jerusalem at the Battle of Hattin (1187). This Order was always linked to the efforts of the northern German merchants to move into the Baltic States, where they wanted to establish trading posts around the Baltic Sea and to convert the area to Christianity. The merchants followed the conversion attempts in the late twelfth century, and the Order was established to protect these areas and continue this conversion process, often by force.

Founded in 1202 by the bishop of Livonia, by 1206 the Order had firmly established itself in Latvia and Estonia. There were many criticisms of their conversion methods by both the popes and the Holy Roman Emperor, at this time and evidence suggests that conversion was often brutal. While conversion to Christianity was meant to be their aim, it appears that their priority was gaining land for their own advantage, and where they achieved this they established themselves as feudal landlords.

The criticism of the Order and their methods, along with a serious defeat by local Lithuanians and Semigallians in 1236, led to the pope placing them under the control of the Teutonic Knights as a separate division in the following year. They survived as the Livonian Order within the Teutonic Knights, ruling their own lands until 1525, when the Teutonic Order was dissolved. The Livonian Knights themselves were finally dissolved in

Secular orders

In contrast to the military Orders, the secular orders of chivalry did not have their roots in the Holy Land, and while military in concept were actually more ceremonial and personal orders. This type of Order was used in different ways, from creating ‘bands of brothers’ whose members could act as bodyguards, to acting as a vessel for patronage or reflections of personal esteem.

When the first of these orders was founded in the early fourteenth century, they reflected the changes that were happening to the idea of chivalry. Whereas the earlier centuries saw knights bonding through a common code, by the later centuries these orders reflected a change to a more nationalistic ideal. The orders required an oath of loyalty to their founder, and they were often formed in periods of internal problems. The early Order of the Sash, in Castile, was founded by Alfonso XI (1311–50) in 1330, when he needed a band of loyal knights around him. Likewise the founding of the Order of the Golden Fleece by Philip III (the Good), Duke of Burgundy, (1396–1467) in 1430 could be seen as an attempt to impose a Burgundian focus for the knights within it, as Burgundy at this date was a collection of different areas and languages.

The table below illustrates many of the important secular orders founded in our period. Some did not survive, for example, the Castilian Order of the Sash did not survive past the fifteenth century; but many have survived to the present day. This is only an illustration of the popularity of these chivalric orders in our period.

<i>Order</i>	<i>Date of foundation</i>	<i>Founder</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Current status</i>
St George	1325	Charles I	Hungary	d. 1382
The Sash/Band	1330	Alfonso XI	Castile	ongoing
Garter	1348/9	Edward III	England	ongoing
Star	1351	John II	France	d. c. 1360
Ermine	1381	John V	Brittany	d. 1524
Dragon	1408	Sigismund	Hungary	c. 1437
Golden Fleece	1430	Phillip III	Burgundy	ongoing (Spanish Order)
St Michael	1469	Louis XI	France	1790
St Hubert	1444/5	Gerhard V	Julich (Germany)	ongoing

Crescent	1448	Rene I	King of Jerusalem and Aragon	d. c. 1486
Golden Spur	1357	Charles IV	Holy Roman Emperor	ongoing (Papal Award)

One of the most significant orders was that of the Garter, founded in England by Edward III in c.1348/9, for only a select twenty-five members. This Order is significant, as it is very well documented and demonstrates many of the elements of the other orders across Europe. All of these had a very significant religious component and often a religious home. In the example of the Order of the Garter, this was St George's Chapel within Windsor Castle.

Women in chivalry

The role of women in chivalry is often a romanticised one, of the lady receiving the devotion of her champions in a tournament, who then wore her colours during the fighting. This romantic role can be seen in the literature of the period, where love is often expressed in its spiritual rather than physical sense. While the tales of Arthur's queen Guinevere and her adulterous affair with Lancelot were well known, chivalric relationships were generally platonic in nature. The actual role for women was very limited, as chivalry at its core was an expression of military skills, from which women were excluded.

The chivalric orders above were mostly male; the exception was the Order of the Ermine, which not only allowed female members from its inception but also had a medieval female Officer, Katharine Potier, in fifteenth century. Other orders did include women as additional members, in the case of the Order of the Garter women were appointed as Ladies of the Garter as additional members, not as replacements for knights.

Heralds and heraldry

Within chivalry there were another class of people who were important in its development and implementation, the heralds. Their original roles were to organise and publicise tournaments, as well as announcing knights in battle or tournaments. Heraldry itself was also part of this recognition system when knights carried images on their sur-coats or banners in battle for identification. This was seen, for example, at the Battle of Hastings in

England, in 1066, when the Saxon army displayed the dragon symbol, and this identification system developed and became more complex from this period.

By the twelfth century, the different emblems and shapes used on shields had become an agreed code, with descriptions, always in French, recognisable across Europe. Whereas it had begun in order to identify knights and distinguish them from each other, by 1300 it had also developed to represent a knight's ancestry and lineage, and it became a method by which society could be divided. The ability to display a coat of arms (literally) became a way of reinforcing the idea of knighthood being a 'class apart'.

As heraldry developed, it needed policing, and this became an additional role for the heralds. Their earlier abilities to recognise one knight from another in battle developed into keeping the records and examples of these emblems and decorations in each country across Europe. By the fifteenth century, heralds also acquired the right to be able to confer these coats of arms. The role of heralds has been undervalued until recent historical works that have illuminated their role across Europe in regard to chivalry.

By 1300 the heralds also had a hierarchy of their own in each jurisdiction or country, with similar titles, for example, 'King of arms' was the senior herald with other ranks below them. This system developed more quickly in areas with strong monarchies, such as England and France, and in areas where monarchy was weaker, such as Germany, this process took a little longer. It must be noted that many coats of arms were also granted retrospectively, with Jesus Christ, the Virgin Mary, King Arthur and Julius Caesar, among notable figures from the past being designated these by the heralds.

As with other areas of chivalry, heraldry and heralds display the evolving nature of the genre over time. Whereas their early function was entirely military, on both battlefields and in tournaments, by the sixteenth century this became largely ceremonial and reflected the social status of knights rather than their military prowess. Heraldry moved away from a battlefield scenario to one of aristocratic culture. In 1066, the Saxons displayed just one symbol, but within two hundred years this idea was much more complicated: the shields were quartered, with labels to denote the sons of kings, supporters either side of a shield and crests above, all subject to definition by the relevant country's heralds. This display was used to identify a knight's heritage and lineage, not his military prowess.

Courts of chivalry

The development of heraldry and the role of heralds (above) also led to the development of courts in each jurisdiction. In the context of pure chivalry these courts were based on the idea that a knight had sworn an oath and would suffer dishonour by breaking it. When a knight was accused of breaking his oath it was tested in a court of chivalry. While these courts were nationalistic in nature, the overriding nature of knighthood mostly ensured fair trials whether the accused knight belonged to that country or not.

The knightly oath underpinned the behaviour of knights in battle, and therefore both sides in a conflict upheld such customs as ransom, avoidance of unnecessary deaths or injury to non-combatants and the display of many of the original chivalric values.

End of chivalry?

As with many areas of history the decline of chivalry is as much debated as its core values. For some authors the end of chivalry could be seen at the time of the French Revolution, for others it is World War One; but for many medieval historians the debate brings the possible end closer to our period. The end of the medieval period, that is, the end of the fifteenth and the beginning of the sixteenth centuries is often seen as the end of chivalry, due to the changing nature of warfare; or it is sometimes placed a little later and linked closely to the Reformation, in deference to the role the Church played in the idea of chivalry. While some of the orders of chivalry for example, the English Order of the Garter and the Spanish branch of the Order of the Golden Fleece, do survive to the present day, their purpose is now mainly ceremonial, and reflects the continuation of a monarchy not necessarily a survival of the earlier Code of Chivalry or chivalric actions.

Disagreements about the decline of chivalry reflect the importance placed by different authors on the various aspects of chivalry. Scholars tend to date the end of the era according to the decline of the particular aspects they think most important.

In terms of warfare, chivalry might even be said to end with the advent of the importance of archery, especially the English Longbow, in battle in the fourteenth century. These weapons were not related to the prowess of a knight, did not discriminate between enemies and did not require any individual skills to be demonstrated, as in a tournament. While knightly skills were still needed in a different phase of a battle, the use of arrows,

and of cannons in the fifteenth century, could be said to herald the demise of the knight on horseback as the decisive element of a battle. The role of these weapons in undermining the importance of the individual knight in battle is acknowledged, and can be seen as part of the decline, not the end of chivalry itself.

Chivalry, as with any concept or community over a long period, would be expected to evolve over time and reflect the society in which it occurred. The conditions in the eleventh century were not the same as those in the later period of the Middle Ages, and chivalry reflected this. One important aspect was the rise in importance in both secular society and in the Church of the nation state. This is an important consideration as loyalties to a nation overrode any other consideration. Loyalty was first demanded by the lord, be it king or duke, then the Church, and in the rise of the national, secular chivalric orders, which reflected this change chivalry can be seen by.

What can be seen by our period was the set of chivalric values expected actions in the field of battle were codified. The skills of a knight were still valued in the sixteenth century but in a different way and often as part of the drama and pageants in the tournaments still held across Europe. Chivalry had become the milieu in which aristocrats lived and behaved, becoming chivalrous rather than chivalric. Chivalry gradually moved away from the battlefield, and the role of the chivalric knight on horseback became more a memory than reality by 1550.

Further reading

Barber, R., *The Reign of Chivalry* (Woodbridge, 2005)

Kaeuper, R.W., *Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe* (Oxford, 1999)

Keen, M., *Chivalry* (London, 2005)

Saul, N., *For Honour and Fame: Chivalry in England 1066–1500* (London, 2011)

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Wars and warfare

Introduction

This chapter will look at the nature of warfare in our period and at some of the significant wars that occurred within it. Warfare was an important fact of life for many in this period, and it had different impacts depending on status, gender and geographical location.

In the past much historical writing and research has focused on the many battles of the period, for example, Crecy 1346, Poitiers 1356, Najera 1367, Tannenberg 1410, Agincourt 1415 and Bosworth 1485. These studies concentrate on battle tactics and the role of important knights and commanders. However, other research has emphasised a different approach to the study of this discipline, moving from battles to the importance of siege warfare, arguing that the defence or capture of fortified cities or castles needs to be identified as the dominant feature of the period. This theory, which has been expanded in recent research, argues that the focus on battles does not take into account the whole nature of warfare of this period. This chapter will try to blend these two views.

We shall look at how wars were conducted, the different types of warfare and evolving technologies, along with a summary of the important conflicts between 1300 and 1550. This includes the Hundred Years' War between France and England 1337 to 1453 (actually 116 years), which also included Scotland, and the Crusades in the Holy Land, the Iberian Peninsula and Eastern Europe. The roles of women and mercenaries will also be explored.

Warfare

Military history has been a focus of historical study for many centuries. While the focus in nineteenth-century studies, especially, was on the decisiveness of battles, as mentioned above, recent research has widened this to include a much more 'democratic' focus on the whole army rather than merely the leaders, who were generally all from the nobility in our period. We shall consider siege warfare from the focus of both the besieger and the besieged.

Sieges and siege warfare

Many historians now consider sieges as the most important factor in medieval warfare, and it must be conceded that these were significant and very common across Western Europe in our period. Sieges and siege warfare affected the physical appearance of cities and castles, and the impact can still be seen in the defensive development in the walls, towers and gates of many medieval towns, cities and castles. But it must be noted that a castle was more than just a defensive structure, having a role as the centre of local power and influence, and for this reason castles were important to either defend or capture.

Many fortified sites still demonstrate the technological innovations of the defending forces, but innovation was not limited to defenders. For each defensive advance there was a corresponding progress in the attacking forces. Many of these developments, such as siege towers, cannons and other weapons, have not survived physically, but they can be seen in documents and as illustrations.

The art of siege warfare was a popular topic in literature of the period, which covered both contemporary and ancient sieges. These included accounts of the siege resulting in the fall of Constantinople in 1453, the siege of Rhodes in 1480 (when a small garrison of Knights Hospitallers held out against a large Ottoman army) and the 1456 siege of Belgrade (where the Hungarian forces held out against the army of Ottomans that had previously overrun Constantinople). Literature was also produced about ancient sieges, including the siege of Acre in 1191 and the actions of Richard I of England (r. 1189–99), often within a chivalric context. These writings, which often influence historical research, had a common theme in the fifteenth century of victory over the Muslim threat, which was then still very real in the eastern part of Europe.

Siege warfare was not new in 1300, having developed in earlier centuries across Europe as well as in the Holy Land, where the castles of the military

Orders represented local power bases. Many of the tactics used were descendants of those developed in the ancient Roman Empire. Within our period the development of the concentric castle was refined. These had one or more concentric rings of walls, with the central walls higher than those outside. The external walls had a series of rounded towers that defied easy undermining, and this design was often so effective that the only option for attackers was to starve out the besieged or rely on treachery from within. Other defensive design features of castles included moats, containing either water or spikes, protruding towers to enable defence of external walls and the use of bridges and gatehouses at entrances. Many of these features were not new by 1300, but they continued to be used in our, later, period.

This balance in favour of the besieged was challenged with the development of newer techniques for attackers in the fourteenth century, namely the first mention of gunpowder and cannons. The first recorded uses of this technology were at the Battle of Weardale in 1327, when the English under Edward III beat the Scots, and in Friuti, Italy, in 1337 when the city was under siege by German forces. The use of these weapons was neither widespread nor effective in this early phase, being more important in the later part of our period. But even then these were not entirely reliable and could cause many deaths, both of the operators and bystanders. James II of Scotland was killed at the siege of Roxburgh in 1460 by being too close to an exploding cannon.

The attacks on castles and fortified settlements across Europe took place on the many settlements that had very long histories and were located on the old Roman road network. Towns were besieged more often than castles, as these were easier targets and did not have the same level of defences as castles. The tactics of this style of warfare have been categorised as below.

<i>Besiegers</i>	<i>Besieged</i>
Call for surrender	Stripping countryside
Subvert/intimidate key defenders	Sallying outside
Scaring garrisons	Mining attackers' mines
Mining/Sapping walls	Shelling attackers
Starvation	
Storming defences	
Shelling castle	

These different elements and actions were successful at different times and were dependant on the location of the siege. Castles that were built on

rock, for example, were more difficult to mine for sappers, likewise those built within moats or other bodies of water. An attacking force also had to be aware of potential problems of being besieged themselves by a relieving force, a not uncommon feature of the period.

The belief that the besieged stripped the countryside around a castle to prevent attackers living from the land has also been challenged in recent works. This theory has not always stood up to scrutiny, as damaging the crops meant that any victor would be unable to claim tithes, taxes etc., from a local area afterwards. These elements were the source of their subsequent power. This re-examination suggests there was a more balanced approach to this element of a siege, and here these actions should be seen in terms of a chevauchee raid (see below) rather than a wholesale clearing of all foodstuffs. But long sieges did have a damaging effect on a local area, as large armies and garrisons would need food, and this demand could use up any available local produce.

Those garrisons and citizens defending a fortified site did not always remain with it, and often parties would ‘sally’ outside. This could be to collect food, attack defenders while unaware or escape. The design of castles often had gates within the walls, called ‘sally ports’ or postern gates. These were often small and away from principal entrances, and evidence suggests that they were used for both defensive and offensive actions; besiegers could be admitted clandestinely, and the besieged were able to exit in the same way. But an important point to make is that in this style of warfare there was no role for the *mounted* knight. Knights took part in these events, as part of a besieging army or a besieged garrison, but not in their traditional, chivalric, way. The nature of the fighting on both sides was not consistent with the traditional view of mounted knight in a battle. Any chivalric element in a siege would found in the behaviour of both parties in regard to the ‘Code of Chivalry’ that could be applied, hence magnanimity and/or honour were applied (when it suited the victor).

Battles

Set piece battles litter both the geographic spread of Europe and any timeline of the period. As mentioned above, these have often dominated historical writings and thinking about medieval warfare, a factor that is now being challenged. The emphasis on battles needs readjusting; while they were important, they did not always appear to be decisive in the longer term.

By 1300 the ideal of battle was still influenced by ancient Roman

writers, especially the '*De re militari*', written for Emperor Theodosius (347–95) by Flavius Vegetius Renatus at the end of the Roman period. This book (in five parts) described many of the methods for training an army as well as techniques in battle on land and at sea. Several hundred copies of this manuscript have survived, and they were owned by such rulers as Alfonso V of Aragon (1396–1458), Richard III of England (1452–85) and Louis XII of France (1462–1515). The ideas in this work also described how rulers could rule effectively and well. This was the first work in Latin to be printed in the fifteenth century after the introduction of the printing press.

The process of battles was constant for this period. One side of the encounter would choose a site, and each would then set out their troops. Often religious relics would be paraded in front of the troops before a battle to reinforce the legitimacy of the fight. Once heralds had announced the battle, fighting would begin with the infantry, followed by the cavalry – mounted knights. At all times each side would try to break the formations created by the other. While archers or crossbowmen would start the battle, they could also fight with other weapons once a closer – hand-to-hand – battle had developed. Fighting was therefore brutal, as can be seen in the archaeological evidence of soldiers from battle graveyards, which display huge injuries to skulls from sword blades. Knights attempted to stay on their horses (who could also wear armour) throughout the encounter to retain an advantage, but the idea that they were helpless once de-horsed is not true. Once dismounted (intentionally or unintentionally) they and others would engage in combat similar to that encountered in tournament melees with swords and maces.

A pitched battle could last for several hours; it did not extend into nightfall and ended when one side left the field, often in a disorganised manner. This retreat signalled the end of the battle and often led to considerable bloodshed by the victors. If a leader left or was killed this could trigger such a flight. These elements reflect the training in tournaments: the fighting on horseback, the melee and hand-to-hand combat.

One significant factor of medieval battles was the codes issued by each side. The most significant was the issue of 'no quarter', denoting that neither side would ransom any captured knights, instead all prisoners would be killed. The development of the code of chivalry meant that most battles did offer this ransom option, but the flying of certain flags informed the opposition of a 'no quarter' mode of battle. Orders in this regard were often issued at the beginning of a battle, and in the case of the French, this

was displayed by the flying of the *Oriflamme* their battle standard, last used in battle in 1415 at the Battle of Agincourt. There were a considerable number of battles across Europe in which ‘no quarter’ orders were issued, for example 1461 Battle of Towton, the first battle of the Wars of the Roses in England; and the Swiss pikemen of the Confederacy were renowned across Europe for fighting in this way.

Infantry

Infantry soldiers traditionally are those who go into battle on foot. This was the same in the medieval period, but some of these infantryman, archers or crossbowmen, could also be mounted.

Infantry soldiers were cheaper to hire or equip than the fully mounted knights, and this was a consideration in a period when there was a movement from feudal hosts to armies of paid soldiers. The infantry soldiers replaced the feudal host of agricultural workers armed with axes and spears, but these were not professional soldiers in the modern sense. There were few standing armies in this period, these only being established at the end of our period. Generally, paid soldiers did not fight all year as fighting was still seasonal, but there were soldiers who were employed all year as garrisons of castles and fortified towns.

The skills of infantrymen varied across Europe due to the weapons of choice, especially in regard to archery. The crossbow was a popular choice for many mainland countries, for example, France, but England and Wales favoured the longbow. There are currently large-scale historical projects analysing the make-up of infantry soldiers in this period, and attempting to understand their composition, categorisation and origins. For example, the soldiers who fought in the Agincourt campaign of 1415 under England’s Henry V (1387–1422) have been included in a wider study of late medieval soldiers, and can provide much interesting data for on-going research (www.medievalsoldier.org).

Soldiers fought under a captain, and they might be regarded as his retinue rather than a company of soldiers in the modern sense. Infantry comprised archers or crossbowman of both peasants and the middling sort, often from urban not rural backgrounds. It was not an entirely unskilled group of men, and often companies of men developed specialist skills, for example the Swiss pikemen (see Mercenaries below).

The infantry represent the changing nature of warfare, as their numbers increased in campaigns in comparison to the numbers of knights. Their ability to fire a considerable number of missiles towards their enemies was

often decisive. This can be demonstrated in the battles of the Hundred Years' War between the English and the French, for example, Crecy, 1346, Poitiers, 1356 and Agincourt, 1415, where the sheer number of arrows being fired by longbow into the French forces was a decisive element of the battle. The use of crossbows rather than the long or short bow was a controversial act in this period; because their bolts were able to pierce armour, they had been banned several times in the past, but to little avail. The English Magna Carta (1215) and the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 both banned them specifically, but despite these concerns these were a popular weapon in sport and also war, especially on mainland Europe.

The number of infantry was also important in this period, as large numbers of men in a battle could restrict the actions of the mounted knight, and the use of their spears stuck in the ground could provide a defensive line against these heavily armed and trained knights. The idea of ranks of men on foot using their weapons in this way was not new and can be seen in the tactics of the Roman armies of the past. The infantryman of our period was the direct descendant of the Roman soldier, and this situation only changed with the increased use of handguns and cannons throughout our period.

Cavalry

The cavalry section of a medieval army was made up of those who fought on horseback. This is traditionally seen as the mounted knight in his armour as mentioned in the last chapter. We shall also consider the light cavalry (see below).

The traditional cavalry composed of knights was always a small portion of any army. Not only was it expensive to outfit and provide correct training, but by 1300 this was the privilege of the elite in society, further limiting the numbers of knights available. Their role in battle was to charge after initial action by the infantry sections, and their success was not always guaranteed, as seen in the battles mentioned above from the Hundred Years' War, where the cavalry charges often led to large casualties and a high death rate. While all battles had a similar composition, they would not follow a single pattern, but would vary according to the commanders' tactics, the position of the armies on the battlefields and other factors, such as rain.

Cavalrymen did not always stay on their horses, and they could make a big impact when dismounted. It was their skills in the melee of a battlefield that could often be a deciding factor. But it must be noted that these

soldiers were part of a much larger host, and their role has often been celebrated in literature and art to the detriment of the infantry.

Leaders of cavalry units were often captains of companies of infantry as well. They were also members of the elite section of society, and they could be closely involved with their rulers, with considerable political power as well.

Light cavalry

In a late medieval army there were also units of light cavalry. These were mounted soldiers who were not of the knightly class, lacking either the status of birth or the money necessary to become a knight. As such they were not protected by the same quality of armour and did not have the knightly training associated with chivalry. These were as numerous as infantrymen, and the two groups were often interchangeable.

Members of the light cavalry were also used in a forward, intelligence collecting role, or as a flanking force in battle. Different countries used this corps of men differently. In Hungary, for example, the light cavalry was often made up of mounted archers. In Spain, these men were called *Jinetes*, and travelled with a javelin, sword and shield, developing tactics to deal specifically with the Moorish armies on the Iberian Peninsula in this period. Likewise, in Italy and Germany many crossbowmen were mounted in battle, while in France these troops were only developed from the fifteenth century, when they were known as *Coutilier* troops. England also mounted some light cavalry called *currouers*, and records survive of their role as scouts in the wars between England and Scotland.

Chevauchee raiding

Not all medieval military action was the set piece battle or siege warfare, and alternatives were the 'chevauchee' raids. These were swift, decisive attacks on both military and civilian targets by a small mounted force. These forces lived off the land, creating pressure for food in the areas in which they travelled, and their surprise element had a great impact on local populations as well. In addition to the pressure placed on civilian populations, these raids were also used to encourage an enemy to come to battle, and to undermine the authority of an opponent who was powerless to prevent such incursions, in addition to destroying their resources.

These chevauchee-style raids were not a new tactic by 1300, but many commentators make much of their use by Prince Edward, the Black Prince,

(1330–76), in the Hundred Years' War in France. The Scottish knights in the north of England also used this style of fighting in our period.

In many ways these raids could be compared to guerrilla tactics of today, where a relatively small force could cause havoc and fear in an area disproportionate to their size. The actions of the Black Prince achieved this in France in 1355 against John II of France (1319–64). However, these raids do illustrate the difficulties of aspiring to the Code of Chivalry in a conflict, as civilians were meant to be protected from the impact of military campaigns, yet it was this section of the population that suffered most from chevauchee raids conducted by knights. Often the knights who conducted these raids were not paid, but expected to benefit from looting, ransoms and any booty acquired during their travels across an area, to the detriment of both civilians and other soldiers. It is the chevauchee raid that epitomises the difficulty of chivalry in warfare and its practical implementation.

Naval battles

Naval battles and campaigns in our period only affected those countries that had a coastline and engaged with waterborne trade, that is, the areas around the North Sea, the Black Sea and the Mediterranean. As with medieval armies, naval warfare was not new in this period and there were regional differences in how these conflicts were carried out. The Mediterranean and Black Seas are not tidal, and they have more settled weather than around the North Sea coast, both factors that influenced the number and style of naval conflicts. In addition, any country's control over the sea waxed and waned in relation to their relative power at the time. Naval conflicts were significant in the later Crusades to the Holy Land, but these were before our period.

The involvement of any navy in a conflict was often limited to the transport of soldiers, rather than actually taking part in the fighting, and for actual naval conflicts the ancient Roman model was still used, especially in the Mediterranean. There were no significant developments in naval warfare from the period *c.* 500 AD to 1500, when the use of gunpowder and cannons fundamentally altered this area of combat. Likewise, the development of ships reflected the areas in which they operated: those in the Mediterranean remained as galleys, relying on rowing as propulsion, while those in the North Sea relied on sail power in rougher seas, and over our period these developed superstructures at the front and rear, known as fore- and aft-castles.

It was the introduction of cannons and guns from the late fourteenth and

early fifteenth century that changed the nature of naval warfare. Originally used to disable an enemy before the traditional boarding of an enemy's vessel for hand-to-hand fighting by soldiers, these gradually developed into weapons designed to sink these ships entirely from the late fifteenth century. It was here that the fore- and aft-castles became significant, and they are seen in the fleets built by both England and Spain in the sixteenth century, culminating in the Spanish Armada attempting to invade England in 1588.

Many naval conflicts were related to trade and its protection, as well as being extensions of conflicts on land. One consequence of naval activity in our period was the development of technology in ships, their weapons and the defensive structures that were built along affected coastlines. The developing naval technology extended beyond the needs of warfare; this was also the period in which European sailors also were exploring the Americas, the Caribbean and Africa.

Technology

Castles and fortified settlements

Castles and fortified settlements developed both to protect their populations and to attack their besiegers. As mentioned above, the concentric castle enabled much better defence than earlier castle designs, due to the use of several lines of defence: having breached one line, attackers were confronted with others. This breaching also placed them in a position where defenders could fire arrows and other missiles at them.

Castles were designed with arrow slits in their walls, which gave the besieged considerable range for firing arrows, while presenting only a very small target for attackers. This was an old idea that was still current in our period. The survival of those inside a besieged castle or town was a significant consideration for this period, and many castles were designed with deep-water wells in their centres, and massive underground areas for the storage of food. These elements enabled them to last considerable periods under siege, when it was a challenge for attackers to keep an army in the field for any length of time.

Defensive designs also took into account vulnerable areas such as gates. Here the classic ideas of portcullises, deep moats, drawbridges and devices for the pouring of hot substances over attackers were still integral to the defence of these sites.

In the earlier periods the advantage was with the defender as long as they

were able to survive a siege, and wait for a relieving force. This was not always possible, and starvation of a site could also be seen as an effective attack. Sapping or undermining of walls took place on both sides, and occasionally their tunnels could meet, leading to fighting in these enclosed areas or the use of smoke in tunnels to suffocate opponents.

Before the use of gunpowder in the fifteenth century, the tactics for attackers had been unchanged for a considerable period. Once besieged, a truce or honourable surrender was offered, and should this be turned down the siege could begin. Not only were the defenders denied freedom of movement, they were often under considerable threat. The use of battering rams on gates was common, often with the soldiers protected by some type of platform above. Ladders were used to scale the walls, leading to hand-to-hand combat if this was successful. Trebuchets, or large catapults, would be constructed on site to fire missiles of all types into the castles. Engineers on site also built siege towers, where archers could fire their missiles from a greater height and into the castle rather than from the ground.

But it was the development of cannons, and the damage these could inflict on walls and gates, that changed this balance of power from the besieged to the besieger. The older castles, while built with very thick and strong walls, were not an effective defence against this new technology. Early, fourteenth century cannons were not particularly effective, but over time these developed, and they rendered siege machines redundant, taking over as the major element in siege warfare until a wall was breached, when hand-to-hand combat took over.



Figure 10.1

Armour

Armour developed over the centuries from padded jackets, (chain) mail and plate armour. By 1300 these developments were important, as improved crossbows and arrows meant earlier forms of armour were insufficient to prevent injury. The ‘classic’ suit of armour was in its fully developed form by the fifteenth century. Contrary to many stories, this armour did not render knights helpless when dismounted, indeed it was possible to perform cartwheels when wearing a full suit. Plate armour was also relatively light at this date, only becoming much heavier after the sixteenth century in reaction to small arms and the need to provide protection from bullets. This type of armour was only abandoned completely in the seventeenth century, when helmets, breastplates and gauntlets were used instead.

In a similar way, horses were also protected with plate armour after the earlier protection of padded cloths that were also used for heraldic display. By the middle of the fifteenth century, horses wore a combination of plate and leather for protection, which, in combination with the knight’s armour, could provide a great deal of protection for both horse and rider. These sets of armour could be designed together, and while some were made for battle, many of the surviving sets were only for display or ceremonial purposes, especially those made in the armoury of Lorenz Helmschmid in Augsburg, Germany in the second half of the fifteenth century. Horses needed this protection, especially for their underbelly, as this was a target for foot soldiers in battle to destroy the advantage of a mounted knight. In the same way as knight’s armour this protection for horses declined in use after the middle of the sixteenth century.

Armour for both knight and horse was an opportunity for display of heraldic emblems, both for recognition on the battlefield and as an opportunity for display of arms and family antecedents. These could be painted on leather or etched on plate, with coverings in fabric as well. Manuscript illustrations of knights often comprise both horse and rider for maximum visual and heraldic impact.

Armour for infantry was, as might be expected, much simpler than that constructed for mounted knights, and both quality and quantity depended on an ability to pay for this equipment. At the very least, an infantryman would wear a helmet, breastplate and type of gauntlet made from metal or leather boiled in oil or wax. These were often covered in a coat constructed from mail – interlinked metal rings. The term ‘chain mail’ was not a

contemporary term. While not as effective as a full suit of armour, these could offer considerable protection in a battle. If an infantryman was in battle as a member of a lord's retinue (part of their feudal obligation), this armour might be provided. In these cases they often wore badges or surcoats with the arms of their lord displayed, both as a display of prestige by the lord, and also for identification in a battle.

Weapons

The late medieval period saw a change over time in the weapons used in warfare. In 1300 weapons were principally blades, blunt instruments, archery (long, short and cross bows) and those involved in sieges. By 1550 these had been supplemented and often supplanted by guns and cannons. In 1300 weapons were those seen in the chivalric tournaments that acted as training grounds, but by 1550 the influence of tournaments had declined, and the use of guns in warfare was more widespread.

The use of gunpowder, in guns and cannons, deeply affected the nature of war in the Early Modern period, and it can be seen as one of the indicators of the end of the medieval period. While the introduction of gunpowder and guns did change the weapons of the elite in this earlier period, for the infantry the use of stakes and poles was still important, especially against cavalry charges, until at least the nineteenth century.

As mentioned above, sieges, as the dominant feature of warfare in this period, were also affected by the introduction of gunpowder and cannons. Early castle designs were effective against the early breaching technologies of sapping and undermining or scaling walls. But they could not withstand cannon fire, and the development of this technology equalised the advantage the besieged had held over the besieger. Defenders could also use cannons, but the mobility of these on mounted carriages made them a flexible weapon in siege warfare for the attacking armies. The medieval castle, while providing some protection against a siege, did not always survive in a battle that used cannons.

Mercenaries

In feudal areas there was a reliance on people under the control of a lord to provide men for fighting, these small 'armies' joined with others to fight for a lord or king. The decline in pure feudalism meant that by 1300 this type of general 'feudal host' was in decline and often armies were paid. Mercenaries were those who fought for countries other than their own, and

their emergence and categorisation is a subject of much historical research and debate. Mercenary armies were generally of mixed descent, and often formed bonds of some type with their mercenary leader to whom they owed loyalty, rather than a king or prince.

There is evidence that mercenaries were used by most of the states across Europe at various times, and this depended on an ability to pay. Mercenaries were often brutal and destructive, and they demonstrated no loyalty beyond an ability to earn money. While revisionist history has tried to bring these men into a clearer focus, they still appear to have been males who enjoyed using their military skills for financial reward. The economic effects of disease, for example successive plagues across Europe, did mean there were considerable numbers of men who chose this lifestyle to avoid hunger, poverty or warfare in which they were powerless, or just for the enjoyment of fighting.

While many nation states employed mercenaries at certain points, in our period the Italian city-states were major employers of mercenaries in their struggles with each other. A famous mercenary, who also had a very high chivalric reputation, was the Englishman John Hawkwood (c.1320–94). Hawkwood led the White Company from 1363, and engaged in mercenary activities in Italy fighting for different states, including the pope, although he finished his service in Florence where his memorial is located. Despite being an adventurer, whose loyalty to his employers was not strong, Hawkwood has been celebrated as a chivalric hero for his military skills, especially in Ramon Lull's *Book of the Order of Chivalry*.

Other groups of mercenaries also developed in this period, including the *Swiss Pikemen*, who fought as mercenaries across Europe. This group became the pope's Swiss Guard in 1506, and they can still be seen in Rome dressed in a uniform supposedly designed by Michelangelo (though this has not been proved). This current corps of soldiers still requires their members to be of Swiss birth. The *German Landsknecht* were also famous mercenaries of this period; they fought in Sweden for the King of Denmark and in Spain against the French early in the sixteenth century. The other famous groups were the Italian *Condottiere*, contracted by different Italian city-states; these were often landless nobles as well as princes who used this profession for financial advancement.

Mercenaries were subject to contracts by their employers, but they do represent a divergence from the idea of chivalry. Instead, these groups were known for their military skills, the *art of war*, and greatly improved general military tactics. While there was still a place for the mounted knight in their battles, these were increasingly bloodless in our period and were often

decided by the actions of pikemen and, gradually, those using handguns.

Women in war

Medieval warfare was principally a male event. Knights and infantry in battles and sieges were all men, and women were normally relegated to a minor role. Women could be caught up in events, such as sieges, if their homes and land were overrun by an enemy or even a friendly war host. Others chose to follow an army as a wife or prostitute (although specifically banned from the early Crusades to the Holy Land). In very rare cases women could act as leaders in warfare, and in this context have been the subject of much research, looking at their roles, their emergence in a male dominated arena and their ultimate fate. Women in this category include Joan of Arc (1412–31) in the Hundred Years' War and Queen Isabella of Castile (1451–1504), who with her husband Ferdinand of Aragon (1452–1516) was behind the final expulsion of the Moors in the Iberian Peninsula (the final act of The Reconquista).

These two women came from very different backgrounds, and their fate and place in history is also very different. Joan was a young girl of peasant background who believed that she was called by divine intervention to assist the French army against the English in the siege of Orleans in 1429. Her intervention was credited with the change in the fortunes of the French in this period of the conflict, and she was present when Charles VII of France (1403–61) was crowned in Reims in July 1429. Joan was not just a source of divine inspiration to the French troops, she also offered tactical advice and led troops wearing armour. She was later captured by Burgundian forces, in 1430, and then transferred to the English, who subsequently put her on trial for heresy. One of the charges against Joan was her use of male clothing, which while a practical consideration in both battles and in camps was considered a major sin. She was also accused of witchcraft and heresy in regard to her visions. Her humble background was not an issue, but her perceived ambiguous femininity was seen as a threat. After a year in prison (guarded by men and not nuns as might be expected) Joan 'confessed' her visions were a lie, and she was sentenced to death. In 1431 she was burnt at the stake in Rouen, but after twenty years another trial ordered by Charles VII found her innocent of all charges. She was eventually canonised by the Roman Catholic Church in 1920. Her life, death and actions have been the subject of much research, argument and revision in the following centuries, but her influence at the time of her death and since has been a major force in folklore, literature and art.

In contrast, Isabella was an aristocratic woman and princess, as the daughter of John II of Castile (1405–54). After the death of her brother Alfonso, Prince of Asturias (1453–68) Isabella was involved in the conspiracies against the rule of her half-brother, Henry IV of Castile (1425–74), and she married Ferdinand of Aragon (1452–1516) in 1469. She became queen of Castile in 1474 after Henry's death, and during her reign she not only completed the 'Reconquista', the expulsion of the Moors from the Iberian Peninsula, but she also led her armies in person. She also defended her throne against Portuguese forces, even when she was pregnant. Her rule is noteworthy for both her secular reforms and her 'warrior' role and, like Joan of Arc, she has been the subject of much historical research, as an exceptional women of the period. Isabella was unusual for her age, but she could claim to lead in battles due to her position as queen in her own right. She was a partner with her husband, Ferdinand, not subservient to him.

Other women were important in conflicts, but generally their role was subservient, supportive and rarely considered in the many sources of the period. As such their role in war is only now being teased out of these sources and revaluated.

Wars

The Crusades

The 'Crusades' were a series of conflicts that were based (nominally) on religion, originally conflicts between Christians and Muslims over control of Holy sites in the Holy Land and then later expanding to conflicts between Christians and pagans in the Baltic areas and also the 'wrong type of Christians' in Western Europe. In this context, as we have seen before, Christians meant the Roman Catholic Church, and crusades were generally called by popes, often in response to issues and events in different countries.

The study of the Crusades has a very long history and there is an immense body of historical research on the subject from both Christian and Muslim perspectives. The historical and moral arguments over tactics, motives and events continue, and they cannot be treated in this book, but for those who have an interest in this subject from any perspective, there is a considerable body of work to be enjoyed.

For the purposes of this book the context to crusading in our period needs to be outlined, and we will take as our starting point of the First

Crusade, called by Pope Urban II at the Council of Claremont in 1095. The Crusades were a period in which the killing of a foe was sanctioned by the view that it was done in defence of the Church. Crusades and chivalry had a direct link, in that chivalry perpetuated this idea of the knight fighting in defence of the Church and therefore for the benefit of their soul. Crusaders were specifically granted these spiritual benefits by successive popes, with the last such grant offered by Pope Sixtus V (1585–90) to the Spanish participants in the proposed Spanish invasion of England by the Armada in 1588.

The Pope was in theory the only person able to call a crusade, but this was not always the case. The Sixth Crusade (1228–29), for example, was undertaken by the Holy Roman Emperor, Frederick II, while he was excommunicated.

There were nine numbered Crusades in the Holy Land, from 1096–99 to 1272, but this numbering can be deceptive. There was no thought in 1099 that another crusade needed to be called; they did not know they had participated in the ‘first’. The numbering is the subject of some discussion, as it implies a sequence that has been applied retrospectively. This traditional list does not include the ‘Children’s Crusade’ of 1212, not called by any pope, which involved a large number of young people from the Chartres area of France and some from Germany, who aimed to reach the Holy Land to free it from the Muslims. But very few, if any, ever reached the Holy Land; most were killed or enslaved, or settled to work in southern Europe. The numbering also gives an impression that between these crusades there were periods of inactivity, but this was not the case. The Crusader States were in a constant state of military alert and small battles, skirmishes and clashes between the different groups in the area were a feature of the period. Also, knights were arriving and departing all the time from Western Europe to perform a service to the Crusaders, to the benefit of the states and their own souls. Many visited the area as fighting pilgrims.

This series of conflicts cover the whole period of Western European influence in the Holy Land, comprising the (Latin) Kingdom of Jerusalem, from 1099–1187 (the date of the Battle of Hattin when Jerusalem and the Kingdom of Jerusalem was lost to the Crusaders), the County of Edessa (1099 to 1144), The County of Tripoli and the Principality of Antioch, which lasted until the fall of Acre in 1291. This date was the end of Western European influence in the Holy Land. The Ninth Crusade (1271–72) represented the last attempt by any Western leader to support these states. The Crusader States were also known as *Outremer* – a French term, meaning overseas.

The Holy Land was problematic as a venue for fighting, as it was a holy site for Christians, Jews and Muslims. For Christians it was the location of the events of the Bible, especially the events in the life of Jesus, his birth in Bethlehem, crucifixion in Jerusalem and Resurrection. For the Jewish people Jerusalem was the location of many events in the Old Testament as well as the location of the Temple of Solomon, which housed the two tablets that Moses brought down from Mount Sinai with the Ten Commandments. The Romans destroyed this Temple in 70 AD, during the First Jewish Rebellion, which was depicted on the Arch of Titus in Rome. The Wailing Wall is the last surviving section of this building. The Temple was used as the headquarters of the Knights Templar in the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem, from which location they took their name.

But Jerusalem was also a significant religious site for Muslims as well, as these three religions share many elements of the Old Testament. The city is also one of three sacred sites, along with Mecca and Medinah, as one of the places visited by Mohammed during his night journey and ascension, represented by the mosque Al-Aqsa. Thus, this city was a focus of devotion for three very different religions by 1100.

Below is a summary of the nine Crusades that took place in the Holy Land. The First Crusade was very much a Frankish campaign, and the Pope, who wanted this to be a Church mission, deliberately avoided inviting kings to participate. After the high point of 1099, this was a series of campaigns trying to keep what had been won. Over the two hundred years of the Crusader States they were under constant pressure from different groups of Muslims and Arabs, and had a complicated relationship with the Orthodox Christians, represented by the Byzantine Empire in Constantinople. While it could be seen as a prolonged failure, the First Crusade's success in setting up these states was a remarkable achievement. After the loss of the Holy Lands in 1291, the *ideal* of the Holy Land and Jerusalem became more a spiritual goal rather than a physical one in our period.

<i>Date</i>	<i>Called by</i>	<i>Led by</i>	<i>Details</i>
First Crusade 1096-99	Pope Urban II	Bishop Adhemar de Puy; Count Raymond of Toulouse; Godfrey of Bouillon, Bohemond Taranto (<i>No kings</i>)	Captured land and created the Crusader States: Kingdom of Jerusalem; Principality of Antioch; County of Edessa; County of

Second Crusade 1147–19	Pope Eugene III	Louis VII of France; Conrad III of Germany	Tripoli Called after loss of County of Edessa in 1144 – did not reclaim this territory
Third Crusade 1189–92	Pope Gregory VIII	Frederick I (Barbarossa) of Germany; Philip II of France; Richard I of England	Called after loss of Jerusalem at Battle of Hattin 1187; failed to reclaim lands around Jerusalem but Richard I did negotiate access to Holy Sites for Christians Never reached Holy Land, instead captured Constantinople creating short-lived Latin Empire Aimed to use route to Holy Land via Egypt. Captured port city of Damietta but never reached Holy Land or even Cairo
Fourth Crusade 1202–04	Pope Innocent III	State of Venice	
Fifth Crusade 1217– 21	Pope Honorius III	Andrew II of Hungary; Leopold VI of Austria	
Sixth Crusade 1228– 29	Pope Gregory IX	Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II (Excommunicated at the time)	Succeeded in negotiating with Sultan of Egypt for parts of Holy Land to be returned, but not significant sites Also aimed to use route to Holy Land via Egypt, also captured Damietta but not Cairo. Captured and ransomed, then

returned to France
 never having left
 Egypt. Louis
 launched his second
 crusade, via Tunis
 this time. Louis died
 of disease on arrival
 and his brother
 Charles of Anjou
 negotiated retreat of
 crusader army
 Attempted recapture
 of Holy Land via
 Acre. No real
 support and Edward
 left on news of his
 father's death in
 1272

Seventh Crusade 1248–54	Pope Innocent IV	Louis IX of France (St Louis)	
Eighth Crusade 1270	Pope Gregory X	Louis IX of France (St Louis)	
Ninth Crusade 1271–72	Pope Gregory X	Edward I (as Prince Edward of England) Charles of Anjou	

Crusades in the Iberian Peninsula

The Iberian Peninsula had been overtaken by a Muslim conquest in the eighth century, but immediately the Christians launched a 'Reconquista'. This term is often associated with the final phase of the expulsion of Muslims from the Peninsula in the late fifteenth century, under the auspices of Ferdinand V of Aragon (1452–1516) and Isabella I of Castile (1451–1504). In fact the Reconquista was set in motion in the eighth century, as soon as the Muslim Umayyad Caliphate extended their territory over more than three quarters of Iberia. Within ten years of the Muslim victory over the Visigoths, who held the territory in 711, the remaining Visigoths and locals fought back and halted the northwards expansion of the Caliphate and started the process of reclaiming the land for Christian kingdoms. Over the following four centuries, the surviving Christians in the very north of the Peninsula, the kingdom of Galicia in the north west and the Basques in the north east, gradually extended their lands to the south. By the tenth

century Galicia had become the kingdom of Leon, and the Basques evolved into the kingdom of Navarre, while the kingdoms of Aragon and Barcelona emerged in the face of this gradual expansion. They were greatly aided by the eleventh century collapse of the Umayyad Caliphate into smaller states.

The twelfth century saw the emergence of the kingdom of Portugal. Their southern border was secured by the capture of the city of Lisbon in 1147.

English Crusaders supported this military action on their way to the Holy Land during the Second Crusade. When this crusade was called, in 1147, the Pope offered the same spiritual benefits for action in Iberia as in the Holy Land, indicating the importance to the Church of the expulsion of the Muslims from this area, a feature of the period and especially seen in the fifteenth century.

The thirteenth century saw more pressure on the Muslim states by the kingdoms of the period: Portugal, Aragon and Castile (Navarre passed to French control in this century), and by 1300 only the Emirate of Granada survived, in the very south of the peninsula. This small area survived in this form until 1481, when the combined forces of Aragon and Castile gradually eroded its land, which by 1492 had disappeared completely, ending over 700 years of Muslim influence on the Peninsula.

In the period between 1330 and 1481 the Iberian Peninsula was fairly static in terms of crusading. There were no serious attempts to remove the Emirate, which played its part in the internal troubles between the different Spanish kingdoms. There was a degree of religious toleration in this period, not only for Muslims but also for Jewish communities. This changed in the fifteenth century, when the Emirate was beset by internal civil war, an event that allowed its enemies to take advantage of a period of weakness. Ferdinand and Isabella, whose initial aim was not complete expulsion, exploited this weakness, and their forces gradually took territory across the eleven years of this internal strife in the Emirate. The fall of Granada, after a defence by their former vassal, Boabdil (Abu Abdallah), occurred because the neighbouring Muslim states were not willing or able to assist his forces.

The gaining of this territory also signalled a change in the attitude of the Christian kingdoms of Aragon and Castile towards their minority communities. While initially the Muslim communities were left to move freely, and were not to be forced to change religion, this did not last. In 1492 the Jews were expelled from these territories and from the kingdoms of Aragon and Castile; those who had converted to Christianity were treated with great suspicion. After a revolt in 1499, large contingents of

soldiers were placed in these areas. The Inquisition also moved into these areas to strengthen the power of the Church.

Finally, after a second revolt, in 1568, the remaining Muslims were expelled from the Iberian Peninsula completely. The Reconquista was a long process, with periods of activity and inactivity like the Crusades in the Holy Land, but in this case the Western Church finally prevailed.

Crusades against heresy

In our period popes also called crusades against what could be called ‘the wrong sort of Christians’. These were groups who chose to worship in a different way from the doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church.

The first of these crusades was the Albigensian Crusade (1209–29) called by Innocent III aimed at the Cathars, who had founded a religious movement in southern France that was considered heretical by the Church. Their belief in a universe that was a battleground between good and evil and where the Church had no authority was seen as a threat. The movement had some support from local nobles, but it was finally crushed by the French kings based in the Ile de France, along with Simon de Montfort (Frenchman and Earl of Leicester c.1175–1218). The destruction of this sect was often brutal, and long-term consequences of this action saw the introduction of the Inquisition to the region and also the founding of the Dominican monastic order of preachers by St Dominic (1170–1221).

Large-scale heresy within Western Europe was not common. The Lollard movement in England, based on the teachings of John Wyclif (c.1330–84), an Oxford theologian, emerged late in the fourteenth century. Wyclif preached against the doctrine of transubstantiation and the supremacy of the pope, and he stressed the importance of the Bible. This stress on the importance of reading the Scriptures in vernacular languages, rather than Latin, is often seen as a prelude to the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century. While there was no Crusade called against Wyclif and his followers, Wyclif’s views and teachings were followed by Jan Huss (c.1370–1415), a Bohemian religious reformer.

The followers of Jan Huss, known as the Hussite movement, were subject to a Crusade called by Pope Martin V (1417–31), in 1420. The Hussites challenged the authority of the Church, believing in the redistribution of church property, and communion to include both bread and wine (wine not being dispensed to the laity in communion at this time). Based in Bohemia, this movement became very popular and widespread, and during the Crusade the papal forces were defeated several times up to

1431, leading to negotiations at the Council of Basle (1431). While these negotiations did have major concessions for the Hussites, a split in their movement between Ultraquists and the more extreme Taborites, eventually led to the Taborites being beaten in 1434 by a joint Ultraquist and Roman Catholic force. The winning Ultraquists eventually won concessions for an independent Bohemian Catholic Church, the expropriation of local church property and their own archbishop. This independent Catholic Church survived until the seventeenth century, in association with, but not under the complete control of, the Roman Catholic Church.

These two Crusades against heretics had very different solutions, the Cathars were defeated comprehensively, but the Hussites were more successful, and their early campaigns need to be seen in the context of the Great Schism, and the relative weakness of the papacy at that point. But this does not disguise the fact that the Hussites won their national concessions due to their military successes; they were the only movement in Western Europe who were successful in this manner.

Crusades in Eastern Europe

The Crusades in Eastern Europe were a direct result of the westward movement of the different Muslim groups across our period. The eastern border of Europe was not fixed in the years 1300 to 1550, and it was subject to a series of conflicts between different European states and the Muslim states to the East.

In 1300 Western Europe extended to the remains of the Byzantine Empire in Greece, and the remnants of the Mongol Empire (Khanate of the Golden Horde) bordered the eastern countries of Lithuania and Hungary. This situation changed in the fourteenth century, with the reduction in the size of the Byzantine Empire and the rise of the Ottoman Empire. It was the Ottoman Empire that pushed across the Bosphorus Straits after the conquest of Constantinople in 1453, into southeast Europe. Under Sultan Mehmet II (r. 1451–81) the Ottomans moved into Serbia and Bosnia and towards Moldavia. In 1529 they reached the gates of Vienna under Suleiman the Magnificent (r. 1520–66), marking the western extent of their Empire. This attack was repulsed, and it is often seen as the high point of Ottoman expansionism into Western Europe.

Hundred Years' War

This conflict was between France and England (1337 to 1453) and only

received its title in the nineteenth century, despite lasting 116 years. After the marriage in 1152 of Henry II of England (1133–89) and Eleanor of Aquitaine (1122/4–1204), the English Crown held many lands in France as dukes (Normandy, Maine, Anjou, Touraine, Poitou and Aquitaine), but as vassals of the kings of France. By 1204 these holdings had been reduced to only Aquitaine. But intermarriage between these royal houses, and conflicts between Edward III of England (1312–1377) and Philip VI of France (1293–1350) led to Edward declaring war on France in 1337 and then claiming the throne of France itself, in 1340, setting this long conflict into action.

The Hundred Years' War has been divided into different periods of activity, during which many battles occurred, including some of the most famous of the late medieval period, Crecy (1346), Poitiers (1356), La Rochelle, a sea battle (1372), Agincourt (1415), Verneuil (1424) and Castillon (1453). This War also included the crowning of the young Henry VI of England as king of France and England, the Dual Monarchy (1422–c.1435), as well as the loss of all English held lands in France (except Calais) in 1453.

Calais was finally lost to the English in 1558, but the kings and queens of England kept the title 'King of France' until 1801. As a conflict, the Hundred Years' War has been the subject of much research and debate, that is seen as a financially damaging conflict, especially for England, but also a period in which the sense of Englishness emerged clearly. After the success of the war the French monarchs moved towards absolutism, whereas their English counterparts, after the Wars of the Roses (1455–85), an internal English dynastic dispute, had their royal power checked. The end of this War is therefore seen as significant for the future of these two countries, and its impact could be seen for centuries.

Conclusion

The period 1300 to 1550 could be viewed as one in which Western Europe was in a constant state of war, and in many ways this was true. It was a period in which sovereign states emerged and often consolidated, and these changes created the conditions for war. This period also saw massive changes in the nature of warfare, from a purely chivalric use of mounted knights and infantry to the introduction of gunpowder in both handguns and cannons. This fundamentally changed the nature of war and warfare in its two dominant processes: set battles and sieges. The late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries are seen as the change from the medieval to the Early

Modern period, and in warfare this newer technology can be clearly seen to be a major influence.

While horses were important in war until the First World War (1914–18), their role in our period was paramount, and even when tournaments were changing to be more theatrical than brutal, this period was still dominated by the horse, which carried both knights and cannons.

Warfare was brutal, bloody and painful, not only for those who fought but also those who lived where these conflicts occurred. While these wars were not global in the modern sense, they did have a major impact on many populations across Europe in this period. This is an area in which wider reading will help to develop a wider understanding of the nature of war, its sources and arguments.

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Peasants, manors, and towns

This book has dealt with monarchs, clergy and nobles, but the majority of people in our period did not belong to any of these groups, but were those who worked the land or lived in the towns. Older histories of this period tended to deal almost exclusively with the other groups, who produced documents and left buildings and tombs as evidence for their existence. It is only in the last fifty years that ‘History from Below’ has really attempted to delve into the lives of the lower sorts of people on the social scale. The only exceptions to this premise were the increasing number of elite people who lived in towns, who produced civic documents and garnered wealth. They have left their mark in history, and will also be dealt with in this chapter.

Therefore we shall now consider the bulk of the population, where and how they lived. This group was the most affected by the numerous natural disasters of the fourteenth and fifteenth century, as many lived closer to subsistence levels; and we shall consider them in the context of the natural phenomena of the period, the end of the ‘Medieval Warm Period’, the Great European Famine and cattle blights of the first two decades of the fourteenth century and the Black Death (1347–50). The relative depopulation of the period after the Black Death also affected this group significantly, and we shall examine the changes in the lives of many of these groups of society from these events.

Feudalism ‘from below’

The system known as feudalism affected many parts of Europe in our

period, although it only applied to rural areas, not towns. By 1300 feudalism in its purest sense was over, and it had evolved into what is known as 'bastard feudalism'. The expression 'feudalism' came from the term 'fief', a type of property holding in which a tenant would hold land from a lord in exchange for service, agricultural or military. The tenant or fief holder was required to swear 'homage' to their lord (in documents also called *dominus* or *seigneur*). This ceremony made the fief holder one of the lords' 'men', and in return they were offered the lord's protection.

A lord could be the lord of a manor or higher up the social hierarchy. Ultimately, all land was held from a king, and great magnates also performed the same ceremony for their land holdings, this action filtered down the social hierarchy to a manor. In the manorial context, the lord, who could be the magnate or one of his own 'men', also ran the local manorial court.

This pure form of feudalism found in the Early (500–1000) and High (1000–1300) Middle Ages was replaced by bastard feudalism in our period, where many military retainers were paid salaries, rather than a lord relying on military assistance from his tenants. It was still possible for feudal hosts to be called, and fief holders were expected to answer a call from their lord to provide military assistance, but these were increasingly rare in our period. Those who answered these calls were often poorly equipped and trained, and many lords preferred to pay for more specialised soldiers. In a rural context, rent and salaries for work on a lord's lands were often preferred to homage and land service.

The feudal system was never as clear as described. Freehold tenants – those who held their land free of obligations – were always a section of communities, and some countries of Europe never had any feudal system at all. Much research on and discussion of feudalism originated in older research where attempts were made to find a common experience of feudalism across Europe. But recent research has indicated that this was a complicated area, with varieties in the concept found both across Europe and also within individual kingdoms. Homage was certainly a factor in our period, but often at a higher level in the social hierarchy. The French kings demanded homage from the English kings, for example, for land they held in France as dukes (including Aquitaine, Gascony and Anjou), rather than for a few fields in a manorial context.

Some areas of Europe did not operate a feudal system at all. These included the Iberian Peninsula, where land reclaimed from the Moorish inhabitants from the eleventh century, and settled by Christian colonists, was free from these obligations. Likewise, in Scandinavia, there were large

areas of Denmark that were not feudal in nature, but this was not a clear division, as some outer areas held by princes imposed these obligations. But in Sweden, Norway and Finland land was held as free from feudal obligations.

Feudalism was found in England (especially after the Norman Conquest of 1066), France and Germany. As a system, it was also known in Central and Eastern Europe and the lowland areas of Scotland. As the Teutonic Knights expanded in to the Baltic areas they introduced feudalism to both incoming settlers and local inhabitants. Unusually, Poland only introduced the feudal system early in the sixteenth century, when Sigismund I (1467–1548) initiated a legal code that locked peasants onto the estates of the nobles.

So what did feudalism mean for peasants and the manors on which they lived? These peasants, who were also called villeins, were effectively ‘unfree’. In the strictest terms, they were unable to move freely between lords or manors, and if they left to go to a town they may have been brought back forcibly. Traditionally it was believed that, should a villein live for a year in a town he was then free of this system and the lord could not insist on his return. Villeins were therefore bound to a piece of manorial land, and had to work in the sections of fields that remained in the hands of the lord of the manor. This work received no wages, but in return they were allocated some of this manorial land to grow their own food and ideally to produce a surplus to sell at market (See Open Field System below).

These peasants also had to pay fines or taxes to the lords at different stages of life, at marriage and at death, when the fine was called a heriot, and often required the best animal belonging to the deceased to be given to the lord of the manor. Over our period and at varying speeds the imposition of villeinage decreased across Europe, and by 1550 it was almost entirely gone. This was in reaction to several factors that shall be examined below.

Peasants

In the highly hierarchical society of late medieval Europe peasants were at the very bottom. This was the state into which they were born, and very few ever moved socially upwards, which could only be achieved by patronage or education. Even within this group there were hierarchies, and some peasants were more prosperous than others, even to the point of being employers. In the traditional, simplistic view of the Middle Ages, when society could be seen as a triumvirate of the Praying Man, the Fighting Man and the Working Man, it was the peasants who laboured on the land.

Peasants is a term given to the poorer members of society in rural areas, not urban ones, and as such made up the bulk of the population of Europe.



Figure 11.1 Peasant father and son working the field (Alphonse Le Sage, thirteenth century)

Source: © Gianni Dagli Orti/Corbis

There were different types of peasants in this category, and included those who *held land* as ‘unfree’, called villeins, and those who were *personally* ‘unfree’, known as serfs. Those free of feudal obligations were able to offer their services in return for a wage, or rented their land from a manor with no obligation to perform service on manorial land. The type of peasant depended on the status of the father, and was inherited through the male line, but mixed marriages were common, and this inevitably meant that this situation was not always clear-cut. Land was often held jointly by husband and wife in our period, to ensure that any surviving spouse had no problems of inheritance.

Where a lord farmed his own land with waged or unfree peasants it was called *demesne* farming, a term also applied to monastic land farmed in the same way. This is a significant term in respect of the changes in

agricultural in the decades after the Black Death, when this practice gradually died out in favour of farm rental.

Open field systems

This was a common feature of many manors across Europe in our period and applied especially to those in the feudal system. Open field systems divided fields into strips (in England 22 yards wide by c.220 yards long). These strips were then allocated to the lord and to the peasants on the manor. Agreements were reached by all of these workers on the nature of the crop, plans for harvesting and when in a three-field system one field would be rested. Peasants therefore had to work on their own strips and on those belonging to their lords to ensure a good crop and harvest. This system also ensured that each strip holder would have a share of good and bad fields. The marks of these strips of open fields can still be seen in fields across Europe today, especially in those that have been mainly grazed in subsequent centuries, through what is now known as a ridge and furrow pattern in fields. It has also survived as a working system (although not within a feudal system) in a few farms, for example, in the village of Laxton, Nottinghamshire, England.

Open field systems gradually diminished in our period, as enclosure of these fields enabled landlords to rent out larger fields as a replacement for direct labour. But as a system, it survived into the twentieth century until legislation ended this practice in France and the Netherlands.

Natural disasters of the fourteenth century

Peasants were the most affected by the natural disasters of the fourteenth century. Until 1300 the population of Europe had been steadily growing, leading to pressure on land to produce food, and by this date marginal land was being used for crops, but with a much lower yield. This population growth coincided with what is termed the 'Medieval Warm Period', which ended around 1300. This situation was exacerbated by a famine in Europe between 1315 and 1322, when wetter and cooler summers led to lower harvests, followed by a cattle blight between c.1315 and 1321. This period is often referred to as a Malthusian Crisis, after a nineteenth century economist whose work led to an understanding of how population growth, when it exceeded its food supply, would create a crisis and mass starvation, eventually leading to a balanced situation ensuring an adequate food supply for a smaller population. This is an area of much research and debate.

Whether these two events stopped the population growth or merely slowed it down is also the subject of much academic research, which is hampered by the paucity of records that reveal population numbers accurately. But, whatever the Famine's impact on population growth, it is clear that peasants suffered greatly. Within another generation, the Black Death devastated populations across Europe, with the pandemic killing an estimated thirty to fifty per cent of the population between 1347 and 1350. This plague and its subsequent recurrences had both immediate and long-term consequences for peasants. In the short term, many farms were unable to harvest, leading to famines. But over time, the need for workers placed them in a much stronger position to negotiate wages and living conditions.

Parliaments tried to stop this, with legislation aiming to keep peasants on manors, and to limit wages and the costs of goods. These were enacted by England, France, Aragon, Castile and the Italian States, and were all designed to control labour prices and keep social order. In this respect they were unrealistic, and they did not deal with the reality of the demographic changes brought about by this massive fall in population. The Peasants' Revolt in England, in 1381, is often seen as a result of this legislation, but in fact it was not led by peasants and was a direct result of the imposition of a third poll tax in the kingdom in a short period, as well as the imposition of serfdom. This was suppressed, no more poll taxes were ordered, and by the beginning of the fifteenth century peasants' demands were being quietly met. Peasants were able to rent farms and increase their wages, and this period is sometimes called the 'Golden Age of the Wage Labourer'. This did not take place overnight, of course, and some areas were able to control their peasants more than others. But the effects of the Black Death are often credited with the significant change in the lifestyle of peasants across Europe, with more enclosure, the breakdown of the feudal system, improved living conditions and more freedom to choose where to live and work. It is clear that in the two centuries after the Black Death *demesne* farming was gradually replaced by farm rental across Europe, where peasants whose ancestors worked on a manor with a land service obligation were able to rent farms in their own right, a fundamental change in land holding.

Slavery

Although slavery as it was known in the Ancient Roman Empire had not been a significant feature in society after the Empire's demise, slavery of some sort did survive into our period, but the 'unfree' peasants cannot be

considered in this category. Slavery survived in the south of Europe, in some Spanish and Italian cities on the edge of the Mediterranean. These slaves were captured as a result of some type of warfare, or as a result of the expansion of influence by Iberian countries into North Africa in the fifteenth century. Most slaves were Moors from either the Iberian Peninsula or North Africa, but others were from Russia, Turkey or Greece. Most were women, used for domestic work, and they were often baptised as Christians.

This practice was exported to the New World once this was opened up by the early settlers from Portugal and Spain.

Manors

Manors constituted the lowest unit of land holding across Europe, and affected the majority of the population who lived in rural areas. Recent studies of manors have determined that it is difficult to define a typical manor, but they held many features in common, dependent on their location, geology, demographic and type of lordship. The typical features of a manor are below.

Manor House	Major building
Church	Often parish church
Trade routes/tracks	Never completely isolated communities
Village housing	Many villages had more than one manor
	Most village housing had appurtenances (land/outbuildings for domestic food production)
Common pasture	Often for cattle
Common woodland	For collection of fuel and grazing of pigs
Mill	Wind or water dependent on geography
Fields	Combination of open field systems, areas of demesne farming or rented fields
Court	Manorial court dealt with many petty issues and organisation of open field system Held in either manor house or church
Reeve	Elected representative of peasants
Bailiff	Ran estate in absence of lord
Specialists	Skilled peasants – smiths, potters, tanners = often part-time professions

A greater majority of manors before the Black Death used the open field system and had a number of unfree tenants, but, as discussed above, the economic situation created by this large drop in population meant that many lords were forced to make their manorial tenancies much more attractive by dropping land service and a relaxation of villeinage. This also led to the enclosure of many previously open field systems, and restricted grazing rights.

The lords of manors could be either individuals or institutions, such as churches or monasteries. Research has shown that tenants of monastic manors suffered from a more rigid control than those of secular landlords, and much of the legislation following the Black Death in relation to peasants and lords was driven by these ecclesiastical landlords.

Towns

The number and density of towns across Europe varied, and not all areas had the same level of sophistication and development as was found within these urban areas. These urban dwellers represented a very small proportion of the population of the period. Many medieval towns would be seen as small villages today, and large cities were rare. The development of towns confirms that manors and peasants in rural areas did not practise subsistence farming, as any surplus was sent to towns as part of a market economy. While all towns had a trade/exchange function, many were relatively unimportant beyond their local area, and were located on trade routes.

Unless a town was walled, its boundaries were often vague, as these urban areas habitually had large areas under cultivation within their bounds, including orchards and gardens. But towns principally relied on outside areas for food production and this caused serious problems in periods of famine. Walls around these towns had different functions depending on location, and could be for both defence and prestige. Walled towns often closed their gates in evenings, and even smaller towns might be fenced to provide the citizens with security at night.

The governance of towns and cities was hierarchical but outside of the system of nobility. Generally, the nobility had little impact in towns, except in northern Italy, and intermarriage between nobility and urban elites was not common, though it increased at the end of our period. Within the leading elite families of urban centres there was considerable intermarriage, much as within the nobility and often for similar strategic reasons. Studies of these families reveal that trade relationships were often strengthened by

marriage, and they could occur both within towns and between more remote trading partners. The terms used for these urban elites varied; they included patricians, bourgeois and merchants, depending on location. These elites controlled the government of their towns through councils that were able to demand taxes from citizens for communal projects such as water supplies, a major issue of the period. In principle, town councils were made up of elected members, but as we have seen before election was not a wholly democratic procedure, with severe limitations on who was eligible to vote.

Urban councils attempted to ensure their rights over markets and certain trades by the acquisition of charters that confirmed these privileges. Monarchs granted these royal charters to towns that then called themselves a version of ‘borough’ across Europe.

Germany	Burg
Scotland	Burgh
Scandinavia	Borg
Italy	Borgo
France	Bourg
Iberian Peninsula	Burgo
England	Borough

Royal charters acknowledged that the urban area had a version of local government and the right to tax the local population, and they often granted the privilege of holding a market at specific times of the year. Charters also allowed towns their own courts, at a similar level to manorial courts. In many ways these reflected the organisation of a manor but in an urban context. Towns were also able to charge tolls for people entering or leaving their jurisdiction, especially alien traders.

Guilds were also a feature of urban areas, and they could be religious, merchant or craft; their leading members also served on the urban councils. Religious guilds have been discussed in [Chapter 2](#), and merchant and trade guilds operated in the same way. These guilds were collections of people in the same trade, for example, goldsmiths and weavers. In the larger cities, such as London and Paris, these guilds were powerful and wealthy bodies. Guilds organised apprenticeships, looked after their members in case of illness or death and maintained a priest in their chapels; and they also ensured a monopoly within their town in their particular trade or skill. Membership and leadership of these guilds was well regulated and

monitored by 1300. Craft guilds organised the process of training of members from apprentice to journeyman to master craftsman, terms still found today.

The social hierarchy in towns was recognisable, with elite families at the top and unskilled people at the base; this was measured by wealth rather than titles. Vagrants were attracted to towns but were rarely tolerated kindly. There was a distinction between those unable to work and others who chose not to work. The former were recipients of charity while the latter were vilified.

Towns or cities in late medieval Europe

Northern Italy

The major towns and cities of northern Italy were part of the Holy Roman Empire. As this was a decentralised state with no great unifying head of state the development of many towns, or *communes*, was different from those to north of Europe with strong monarchies. These *communes* were towns whose inhabitants collaborated for mutual defence and regulated their own internal affairs. Over time many of these *communes* also developed into powerful city-states and broke free of any feudal overlords, calling themselves Republics. These included Venice, Genoa, Milan, Florence, Verona, Ferrara, Mantua, Padua and Siena in Italy, as well as Frankfurt, Hamburg and Nuremburg in Germany. Smaller towns also became *communes*, and this accounts for the many walled communities found in northern Italy today, but they did not develop into powerful cities.

The city-states controlled not only their city but also large areas around them, as they had a need for food supplies from rural areas. Venice was one of the densest cities in medieval Europe, and as it was built in marshy land it was reliant on food production from a wider area. In the same way, the mountains surrounding Genoa made that city reliant on a broader area for food. Venice and Genoa expanded their influence beyond their city and hinterland and became important maritime empires in our period. Venice was at the forefront of the capture of Constantinople in the Fourth Crusade of 1204.

In these Italian cities the urban elites were treated as nobility, and over time many of these states evolved to be ruled by particular dynasties. Some of these families gained the right to a noble title or simply bought it, for example, the Visconti family bought the title 'Duke of Milan' in 1395. Venice remained as Republic, with an elected Doge, throughout our period,

although this election was from within a small group of eligible men. The internal governance of city-states was similar to that of many communities around Europe, led by a group of wealthy families.

While Venice and Genoa created maritime empires, other city-states conquered neighbouring areas to form larger, regional, territories. There was a period of many minor wars and conflicts between these states, including the Papal States, ruled by the popes. By 1550 many of these city-states had been subsumed with larger areas, leaving only Venice, Florence and Milan as independent entities. Milan eventually became part of the Hapsburg Empire in 1525; Venice remained an independent republic, while Florence became a republic again in 1527, when the Medici family were expelled from the city.

Low Countries

In the medieval period this area, now encompassing the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg and small areas of northern France and western Germany, were a collection of about twenty principalities. Although these were nominally under the control of either French Crown or the Holy Roman Emperor, in fact they were highly independent. In the fifteenth century the Valois dukes of Burgundy, by a process of intermarriage, came to control many of these and provided a degree of cohesion. In 1477 these were transferred to the Hapsburg family, again through intermarriage.

This was a highly urbanised area in contrast to the rest of Europe and also had considerable levels of industry. The very close relationship between this area and England, for example, was based on the wool trade, and England supplied the many urban centres of cloth production in the Low Countries. This area also imported wool from other areas of Europe and there was a large flax industry in this area, for the creation of linen. This urbanised area had established its independence from the beginning of our period in a similar way to Italy, in that the nobility were replaced by urban elites in the running and organisation of their towns. Often these elites were represented by guilds, although the cities held by bishops were not as successful in this independence as those held by secular lords.

The Low Countries offer an alternative to those areas under the control of kings, and while the dukes of Burgundy benefited from their hegemony over the area, in many ways this was only nominal. This power base did mean that in the later fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the dukes were important and influential people, who often acted in a power brokerage capacity between England and France.

London

London may have been abandoned in the immediate aftermath of the end of the influence of the Roman Empire in Britain in 410 AD, but evidence suggests it was a town again within a short period, as it was located on an important trading route, including the River Thames. By 1300 it had two foci, the City itself, with the Tower of London in the east built by William I, the Conqueror (r. 1066–87) and St Paul's Cathedral and Blackfriars in the west, and the separate urban area around Westminster, a separate community to the west housing the royal Palace of Westminster and the home of the royal Chancery and Law Courts.

The Corporation of London governed the City, with a mayor at its head elected by aldermen (representatives of each ward of the city). The rights of the City were jealously guarded and carefully confirmed by each new king. It was a very rich city and was often called upon to provide kings with funds, especially for war. Despite having the Tower of London in the city, monarchs did not live here and the Tower was only used in a ceremonial way, for example the night before a coronation or as a royal prison; it was also a mint.

There was one bridge over the Thames in this period, London Bridge, which had many houses and even churches on it. This was also gated.

London emerged as a city within a strong monarchical society, and so it did not develop into a city-state in the same way as Florence or Milan. The city did occasionally enter into disputes with kings (and queens); it guarded its freedoms and privileges very seriously.

Paris

Medieval Paris was the capital of the Capetian kings, and it developed into a major city under this dynasty. By 1300 the city was based around the Ile de France area, with the left bank of the Seine the location of many monasteries and the university. This was one of the largest universities in the medieval period, and it attracted students from all over Europe.

Like London, Paris was a walled city, although larger than its Roman antecedents. Population density was very high and the city was divided into different areas by social class. The nobility did have houses in the city, but merchants and guilds ran it in the same way as they ran London, often dominated by a small number of families.

Trade was centred on the River Seine, with several ports along the banks, but whereas London only had one major bridge, Paris had several, linking the left and right banks and also the Ile de la Cite, the location of the

cathedral of Notre Dame. These bridges also had housing built on them and one used its arches as a mill.

Switzerland

The idea of communes within the Holy Roman Empire also applied to many Swiss towns. This country was unique in medieval Europe, not only for its Alpine topography but also for its self-regulation. In *c.*1300 some of the communes of Switzerland created the Swiss Confederacy, free from feudal control but nominally in the Holy Roman Empire. These communes were located in the mountain valleys and passes along important trade routes. The Emperor Charles IV (1316–78) confirmed the original eight Cantons (autonomous regions of Switzerland) as a confederacy, known as the Acht Orte, in 1356. Their mutual agreement made their independence from each other clear, and there were some military skirmishes between members in the fourteenth century. However, by 1370 these cantons were addressing themselves as a single unit.

This Old Confederacy contained the cities of Lucerne, Basle and Zurich, which had joined after attacks by the Hapsburg Emperors. Zurich had previously outlawed involvement by nobility in its business, and had passed laws to ensure the city was run by its guilds.

In the fifteenth century many cities on the periphery of the Acht Orte joined the Confederacy, Schaffhausen in 1454 and Stein am Rheine in 1459. These were joined by St Gallen and Fribourg in 1454, Rottweil, 1463, Mulhausen, 1466 and Rapperswil in 1464. These were often at the expense of the Hapsburg Emperors or the Dukes of Austria.

After the Swabian War of 1499, a peace agreement between the Confederacy and the Emperor Maximilian I (1459–1519) ensured the independence of the Confederacy from interference from the Emperor, but it still remained nominally a member of the Empire itself. This Confederacy was a combination of forest cantons, high in the Alps, and city-states. These cities, unlike those in Italy, joined together to create a larger state rather than try to operate in isolation. While there were early tensions between these members, and some military action, this Confederacy remained a remarkable survival of independent cities away from the control of the Empire.

Their merchants, guilds and leading families, ran the city-states in the same way as others across Europe, but without any inference from the nobility, which was effectively outlawed in this area.

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12

Conclusions

The Europe of 1300 was in many ways very different from that of 1550. The unifying single Church based in Rome had been challenged by reformers of different types, and by 1550 these were undermining and rebelling against the Roman Catholic doctrines and traditions. The Reformers varied in style, from the strict Protestant followers of John Calvin (1509–64), to the more nuanced English Reformation that eventually emerged under Elizabeth I (r. 1558–1603). Not all of the Roman Catholic Church was swept away, and large swathes of Europe, including the Iberian Peninsula, most of France and parts of the Holy Roman Empire, remained loyal. But these divisions in Christianity have never been overcome, and they caused many conflicts, both in doctrine and on the battlefield, for centuries to come.

A comparison of maps between 1330 and 1550 would also show how the borders of many countries, duchies and empires had changed in this period. General trends can be seen: the strengthening and centralisation of the power of the French kings, the changing of the Iberian peninsula to a wholly Christian area under only two kings (Portugal and Spain), the end of Swedish involvement in the Kalmar Union and the union of Poland and Lithuania in the east. While a map might show these as kingdoms, we can see that the notion of kingship in late medieval Europe was a varied one, from absolutism to a limited monarchy or even to kings who were almost powerless. These examples show how different areas of Europe developed in line with national traditions, customs and history; this was not a homogenous continent.

What changed radically in Western Europe between these dates was its

population. In 1300 this had risen to levels that were not sustainable should an agricultural crisis emerge, which it did in 1315. This population boom had led to marginal land being used for food production and a population in which large sections were undernourished. While events of the early fourteenth century saw this population growth halted, the unimaginable horror of the Black Death, which swept across Europe in only four years, 1347–50, reduced this population by thirty to fifty per cent. It was not until 1500 that the population was able to grow, and therefore our period saw many changes in land holding, the rights of peasants and a general rise in living standards. The release of this pressure on agriculture and the increased value of peasants in towns and villages improved their lot in life. They were never rich, but while life might have been hard, this was an improvement on the lifestyle of their forbears in the first two decades of the fourteenth century. What is remarkable about this pandemic is that, while some institutions were challenged, none were lost, for example both kingship and the Church survived intact.

By 1550 the population of Europe had not only recovered somewhat from this pandemic, it was also expanding into new areas of the world. The Portuguese and Spanish extended their jurisdiction into the New World – taking many of their Old World ideas and traditions with them. Other countries of Europe also took this route, but at a later date than those in the Iberian Peninsula.

Every historian could claim that the period they prefer to study was important, and of course I am no different. As we leave Europe in 1550 it is on the cusp of expansion into new territories, embarking on new conflicts based not on land or honour but on religion; within a century the notion of kingship would be severely challenged and in some cases lost. By 1550 the idea of chivalry had become merely politeness and a coat of arms, no longer did a knight ride into battle with a lance, shield and sword; he was more likely to carry a gun or command a cannon. These elements of chivalry became window dressing of a nobleman, not the necessities of war.

I hope this book has provided some context for further study of the late medieval period. The many generalisations have been necessary due to the large geographical area being covered and the long period of time as well. Such is the joy of historical research and study that you would be able to find something to disagree with me in most cases – I hope you find them.

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